

The Creation Narratives in the Dunhuang Manuscripts and the Construction of a Sense of Community Among the Chinese Nation: Focusing on *The Annals of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth*

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Abstract

The Dunhuang Library Cave has unearthed many folk historical manuscripts. The Chronicles of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth is one example, and it records a full genealogy from cosmic origins to imperial succession through stories that ordinary people can understand. These texts are key materials for understanding medieval social history and cultural identity in northwestern China. We use four core manuscript copies as primary sources. Then we examine the textual structure and cultural integration, and we also look at how identity is formed in these texts. It is worth noting that folk creation narratives can shape collective identity when multi-ethnic groups converge in region. We find that Dunhuang's folk historical narratives can be traced back to the lineage of Chinese sage-kings. At the same time, they incorporate Buddhist cosmological concepts and Taoist elements, together with regional cultural characteristics of the northwest. This creates a cultural identity model. It combines Central Plains centripetal force with multi-ethnic inclusiveness, and it can sustain the sense of Chinese unity in multicultural context. Historical memory practices in Dunhuang's grassroots society can show that consciousness of Chinese national community has deep historical roots. Its development trajectory and integration mechanisms can offer insights. We can use these to strengthen awareness in contemporary times.

Keywords

Dunhuang manuscripts, imperial chronicles since the creation of heaven and earth, creation myths, sense of community among the Chinese nation, cultural identity, ethnic integration

1. Introduction

In 1900, Library Cave at Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang was rediscovered. Tens of thousands of documents were found there. They date from Six Dynasties period to early Song Dynasty and these materials can provide physical evidence for scholars to understand medieval social structures, cultural ecosystems, and folk thought. These texts include Buddhist scriptures and official classics, as well as traditional works covering classics, history, philosophy, and literature. Also we can find many popular folk readings not documented in historical records. Different from histories compiled by officials, these texts use accessible language and oral traditions.

They can show grassroots historical perspectives. It is worth noting that they can serve as sources for examining medieval folk consciousness and cultural identity. The *Annals of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth* is a representative example. It traces imperial lineages from the dawn of cosmic creation through the transition between Wei and Jin dynasties, and it combines mythological legends, historical memories, and imaginations from local regions into a folk historical narrative.

Many studies have examined Dunhuang manuscripts about ancient historical legends. Most work uses philological methods and textual criticism. It is worth noting that Guo Feng is one of first scholars who examined the compilation date and textual nature of *The Annals of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth*, also its content structure. This work can be seen as the basis for later studies [1]; Yu Yan also gave a full analysis of various historical legend manuscripts found in Dunhuang, and explained their role in spreading folk knowledge [2]; Liu Shouhua then compared this manuscript with the later folk epic *The Legend of Darkness*, to study its continuity in the folk literary tradition [3]. In general, existing research mainly looks at textual collation. It includes source tracing and content interpretation. But few studies examine these texts from view of the long-term development of Chinese national community consciousness, and their impact on cultural integration and identity construction in border regions with multiple ethnic groups is not fully studied.

Dunhuang was a key location on the Silk Road. In history, people called it a place where Chinese and other cultures met together. Many different ethnic groups lived here for a long time. These include Han Chinese, Tibetans, Uighurs, and Sogdians. At the same time, the ritual systems from Central Plains and Buddhist beliefs can meet with Western Regions civilizations. And the nomadic cultures from north mixed here. In fact, the creation myths and old historical stories in Dunhuang are not just simple copies of existing stories. They show expressions of identity under specific socio-cultural contexts that can be quite complex. Then, these stories reflect the collective memory of ordinary people about Chinese civilization origins. They can show the process of identity adaptation when different cultures integrate together. By examining these narratives, we can get a new perspective. It can help expand research on Dunhuang folk literature. Also, we can reveal the historical mechanisms behind the formation of the Chinese national community consciousness from a grassroots frontier viewpoint. This approach has theoretical and practical value for understanding the development of China's pluralistic yet unified civilizational framework. It is expected to help us see how different cultures can form one system. Next, it should support the efforts to strengthen this sense of community in the new era.

We use four manuscripts from Dunhuang Library Cave as our main materials. These are P.2652, P.4016, S.5505, and S.5785 of “*The Chronicles of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth*” and we compare them with folk historical texts and social documents from Guiyi Army period which has similar characteristics and can help us understand the background. We examine these texts from different aspects including textual form, content structure, and cultural integration. At the same time we look at social function and how these texts relate to contemporary issues. It is worth noting that folk creation narratives helped shape historical identity and community consciousness in frontier regions. This can show academic value and we can use these results as a reference for practical implications and it is expected to help related studies.

2. The Textual Structure and Cultural Characteristics of “The Annals of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth”

2.1 The Existence or Loss of the Manuscript and Its Dating

The “*Records of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth*” can be found in four surviving manuscripts from Dunhuang and they are kept in National Library of China and we can find them in Fajing and Yinghua Collections under numbers P.2652, P.4016, S.5505, and S.5785. These constitute a relatively well-preserved set of materials among ancient historical manuscripts from this region. Among them, only volume P.4016 bears a clear date at its end. It is worth noting that the inscription says: “On the twenty-fifth day of the first month of the Gengxu year during the third year of the Qianyou era of the Tang Dynasty, this single volume was completed.” In fact, the third year of Qianyou corresponds to 950 AD. It was during the mid-to-late Five Dynasties period when the Hexi region was under actual control of Guiyi Army regime. This inscription can provide a reliable reference for dating the entire collection. Although the other three manuscripts lack direct dates, observations of their calligraphic style, paper characteristics, transcription

practices, and use of taboo terms suggest they all date from late Tang to Guiyi Army period of Five Dynasties era. They share a similar chronological context with P.4016 and they belong to same transmission lineage [4].

These editions have different detail levels and binding styles. Also the preservation condition can vary, which reflects how they looked in folk circulation. Edition P.2652 is a scroll-bound volume with a complete title page. It contains 94 lines of relatively coherent text, so we can see it represents the primary form of this edition. Edition P.4016 is a leaf-bound booklet comprising eight and a half leaves with a complete title page. It is designed for easier handling and private storage. Edition S.5505 preserves only one and a half leaves of a fragmentary volume, while Edition S.5785 consists of short note fragments. It is worth noting that the surviving texts from both can be cross-referenced with the complete version to correct omissions and errors [4]. The differing binding methods and preservation states can indicate that this book was widely circulated in Dunhuang society at that time. It served as a text copied and recited by temple scholars and it was also an accessible read for common people who wanted to understand ancient historical imperial lineages, and in this way it can fulfill the functions of spreading historical knowledge and transmitting cultural memory.

2.2 Narrative Structure and Key Content

The *Chronicles of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth* uses a chronological order. It is worth noting that this book tells a full story from beginning of universe to the end of dynasties, and we can see it covers the cosmic origins and also the rise and fall of secular dynasties. In fact the structure includes three layers and they are connected together.

The first layer shows how the universe formed. It depicts the emergence of the Sacred King of Creation, and we can see that this layer establishes the basic cosmological structure that supports the entire narrative framework of the text according to the ancient understanding. The opening passage says: “In ancient times, heaven and earth were not separated, and they were like wind and clouds. After the separation, there was no ruler and no minister, and no sovereign emperor. It took hundreds of kalpas before a Sacred Emperor appeared, and he proclaimed himself as a counterpart to Luo Huang.” This narrative structure covers the initial division of chaos, the separation of heaven and earth, and how the Sacred King appeared, and it inherits the Daoist concept of chaos from pre-Qin period while it includes cosmological theories found in Han Dynasty apocryphal texts, so in principle it can combine different traditions together. At the same time, it uses the Buddhist notion of time measured in kalpas, which means ancient Chinese mythology is placed within cross-cultural cosmological framework, and it should be noted that this framework stands in stark contrast to the traditional singular creation narrative of Central China [2].

The second layer shows arrangement of ancient imperial lineages. We can see it uses bloodline succession as the framework. The text lists founding emperors one by one with their titles. For example, Emperor Peiluo gave birth to Emperor Rongcheng, and Emperor Rongcheng gave birth to Emperor Dateng, then Emperor Dateng gave birth to Emperor Hetou. Also Emperor Lilian gave birth to Emperor Hanzhong, and Emperor Hanzhong gave birth to Emperor Fuxi. Then we can see the Three Sovereigns order. Fuxi is the Heavenly Sovereign. Shennong is the Earthly Sovereign and Zhurong is the Human Sovereign. This lineage preserves symbols of common ancestors of the Huaxia people. Fuxi and Shennong are examples. It also includes many ancient imperial titles that do not appear in the orthodox historical texts. In fact, this can be seen as a reorganization of folk narrative about ancient sage kings' genealogy. It reflects the flexible storytelling approach in the folk historiography.

The third layer can show the historical continuity from Five Emperors through Wei and Jin periods. Following the Three Sovereigns, it mentions Five Emperors—Shao Hao, Zhuan Xu, Gao Xin, Yao, and Shun—and then it outlines successive dynasties: Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han, Wei, and Jin, and all these can form unbroken lineage that connects the mythological time with the historical time. This narrative approach links era of mythological legends with historically documented period. In fact, Chinese history is presented as coherent civilizational continuum that can help understanding among grassroots society. Also, we can see that the concept of historical continuity is reinforced.

2.3 The Nature of the Text and Its Positioning within Folk Historiography

This work is absent from official or private bibliographic catalogs after Sui Shu: Jingji Zhi and Old Tang Shu: Jingji Zhi. In terms of literary style and language use, and also thematic focus, it stands apart from

traditional classics such as official histories and geographical records, together with miscellaneous biographies. In fact, it should be regarded as typical example of medieval popular folk literature. We can characterize this work across three dimensions.

First, it is kind of folk knowledge-based primer book for children in Dunhuang. Zheng Acai and Zhu Fengyu examined the Dunhuang primer texts in the research and they classify this text as part of this genre because the language is simple and the structure is clear and at the same time it does not focus on historical textual criticism but it can help children remember imperial lineages. Also, it can help them understand chronological order between ancient and modern periods. In fact, it should serve as a tool for historical education in grassroots communities and schoolchildren [5].

Next, it is a typical form of medieval folk historiography. Unlike official historical works that focus on periods of turmoil and prosperity or institutional frameworks, folk historiography emphasizes genealogies and legends together with origins, and it can construct historical order through imperial titles and their chronological sequence while political narratives and moral judgments are downplayed. In fact, it can exhibit characteristic of using genealogical records as history and legends are employed to verify past and present events.

Also, it is a full text shaped by the convergence of diverse cultural elements coming together from different sources and traditions over a long period, and its content includes classical texts and historical records while it uses aspects of Buddhism and Taoism. It draws on folk legends and prophecies are included here and customs from frontier regions are integrated. It is worth noting that it is not a simple reproduction of one single ideological system. Instead, we can see it as composite text formed in multicultural environment of Dunhuang. It preserves the core of Chinese history. At the same time, it can assimilate cultural elements from foreign lands and border regions, and in principle it should be viewed as a typical example that shows Dunhuang's cultural character.

3. The Construction of Cultural Identity Behind the Genesis Narrative

3.1 The Folk Reconstruction of the Genealogy of China's Ancestral Forefathers and the Deepening of Cultural Identification

The *Chronicles of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth* can reorganize the genealogy of China's founding ancestors and we use vernacular language to spread this information to people so that the collective memory about civilization origins can reach even in most remote frontier communities. In fact, this work does not copy official historical records directly. It is a new adaptation tailored to social context of these border regions.

We examine the temporal scope of ancient Chinese history. Mainstream historical texts regard Fuxi, Shennong, the Yellow Emperor or other figures as the starting point of human civilization, but this source can trace origins back to over ten generations of primordial emperors including Peiluo Huang and it connects them with developmental trajectory of Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors. The origin of Chinese civilization is pushed to a much earlier period. It is worth noting that such narratives do not align with historical facts. However, they can reinforce the consensus on this point. In fact, Chinese history is long-standing and it predates that of other civilizations. This can provide temporal foundation for cultural identity construction.

Second, the text uses clues of blood ties and we can see that it helps integrate fragmented genealogies of ancient emperors into one unified lineage that was separated in different records before and this is important for the study. In the text, the character “sheng” (birth) connects imperial titles from different periods and it organizes ancient leaders who might have belonged to distinct mythological systems into paternal lineage with good order and the structure becomes clear. This can transform the abstract concept of cultural inheritance into tangible bloodline continuity. It is worth noting that it is comprehensible to the general public. It simplifies the understanding and it can help establish shared ancestral identity in regions with diverse ethnic populations.

Third, these texts put the Huaxia ancestors into cosmological narrative framework. It is worth noting that this can give the group sacred meaning and universal character. The creation narrative outlines the logic of cosmic formation first and then it introduces the concept of sage kings governing the realm, so ancient Huaxia history extends beyond mere cycles of political stability and turmoil and it shares an inherent structure with

process of cosmic creation. This narrative approach can improve the authority of the Huaxia sage-kings system. Also when frontier populations accept these historical legends they can recognize the central role of Huaxia civilization.

In the Guiyi Army period, Dunhuang was on western frontier. It can uphold the orthodoxy of Central Plains dynasty. Local people copied these folk historical texts. It is worth noting that this can help maintain cultural cohesion in the Central Plains and it can also strengthen cultural ties between frontier regions and the interior.

3.2 The Integration of Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist Thought and Their Cultural Coexistence

Dunhuang is a key center of Buddhism for a long time and it is also influenced by Confucian ritual systems and Taoist beliefs from Central Plains, which means the local culture includes elements from these three different traditions that can coexist together in the society. The Records of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth shows this. It is worth noting that the integration is natural. We can see that the three religious philosophies come together at the popular level and it is not a forced amalgamation.

We can see Confucian historical perspective as the core framework. It gives work its basic character. In this work, Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors are used as good models for ancient governance. It promotes principles of abdication and virtuous rule. Also, lineage of sage-kings is included. The evaluation criteria can align with Confucian ideals regarding moral governance. In fact, the imperial succession system is rooted in the classical Confucian historical tradition and it can help protect the identity and legitimacy of Chinese culture, which means this system in principle is expected to maintain the continuity of cultural development in the historical context through the protection of such identity.

We can find Buddhist concepts in cosmic time framework and narrative structure. It is worth noting that the phrase “It takes a hundred kalpas before a sage emperor emerges” uses Buddhist concept of kalpa, and it puts ancient Chinese history into broader cosmic temporal framework. Also, the text has accessible language with well-structured sentences and it is suitable for oral recitation, and these features were influenced by Dunhuang folk sermons and literary style changes, so this can help the Confucian historical perspective spread in a society dominated by Buddhism [6].

We can find Taoist elements in titles of primordial emperors. Also, these elements appear in descriptions about how cosmic formation happened. “Pei Luo Huang” and “Rong Cheng Huang” correspond to Taoist hierarchy of immortals, and it is worth noting that the universe is described as “like wind and clouds” before its division, which can align with Taoist theories about primordial energy and chaos. In fact, Taoist beliefs are incorporated into ancient folk histories. This incorporation can give these texts a mystical character with stronger features, and it should provide a foundation that is rooted in local religious practices and can in principle help us understand the local culture in the region.

We do not treat Confucianism, Buddhism and also Taoism as opposing forces here. Instead, they can use classical Confucian historiography as basic framework and we incorporate Buddhist and Taoist cosmological perspectives along with narrative techniques at the same time and it is expected to create a historical account that works in practice and can be accepted by different groups. It is worth noting that this account can resonate with general populace and is compatible with diverse religious contexts. This should be seen as manifestation of Dunhuang culture's openness and inclusiveness.

3.3 Integration of Multicultural Elements and Establishment of a Unified Framework

We examine the Hexi region where Dunhuang is located. This area has been in history a zone of migration and settlement, and also the interactions between different ethnic groups can be frequent because many peoples lived here together for long time. Yuezhi, Xiongnu, Tibetan, Uyghur and other peoples came here in different periods. They settled successively and this can lead to cultural exchanges. As a folk text with wide circulation, The Annals of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth can include elements from frontier regions and foreign cultures, and these elements are put into framework of Chinese history, which can help reinforce the unity of Huaxia civilization in multicultural context.

We can find some emperor names in this text, but they do not appear in Central Plains classical texts, such as Peiluo Emperor and Xionglong Emperor, and their syllables and word formation can show foreign

characteristics that are different from traditional Chinese names. Scholars think these names may be linked to Western Regions mythology and they can be connected to legends of northern nomadic peoples. These names are direct traces of cultural exchange between Central Plains civilization and frontier ethnic groups [7]. It is worth noting that the inclusion of such names in ancient historical genealogies does not signify a departure from the orthodox Chinese tradition, and instead it demonstrates an inclusive approach that can help integrate symbols of foreign cultures into Chinese historical framework.

About narrative approach, the book has a lineage-based structure. This structure and its oral transmission characteristics have similarity with epic traditions of northwestern ethnic minorities. In fact, the culture emphasizes genealogical continuity and oral transmission in groups like Tibetans and Uyghurs, which can provide social foundation for popularity of such texts. Also, these texts can transcend ethnic boundaries and they gain widespread acceptance.

In fact, the text focuses on Fuxi, Shennong, the Yellow Emperor and other figures as common ancestors of Chinese civilization, while external cultural elements only serve as background context and supplements to the genealogical framework, so the core structure can be kept. This method builds a culture with China at center and includes diverse cultures, and it can respect multi-ethnic realities in peripheral regions. Also, it upholds shared historical identity. This is a manifestation of “unity in diversity” pattern of Chinese nation in medieval grassroots society.

4. The Historical Foundations of Dunhuang's Creation Narratives and the Sense of Community among the Chinese Nation

4.1 The Concrete Manifestation of the “Diverse Yet Unified” Structure as Depicted in the Dunhuang Manuscripts

Dunhuang manuscripts can show the real coexistence of ethnic groups and religions in medieval northwestern frontier regions. Also, we can find many languages in these documents. It is worth noting that this evidence can be used to understand how the Chinese nation formed its multi-ethnic unity in history.

Manuscripts used different writing systems at that time and Chinese, Tibetan, Uyghur, Khotanese, Sogdian and Western Xia scripts can all be found together in same region, which means we can see a complex situation of coexistence in historical materials. Some documents were written by local people for their own use. Also, there were translated texts and bilingual inscriptions. In fact, this can form a multilingual cultural environment. For religion, Chinese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Taoism, Manichaeism and Nestorian Christianity can exist at the same time and develop together without serious conflicts. Monasteries and grottoes helped cultural integration, and community organizations can also support this process, so it is expected that significant religious conflicts can be avoided in principle. In social aspect, many documents can be found including household registers, contracts, community regulations and accounting records, and these materials can show us that Han, Tibetan and Uyghur people intermarried and they collaborated in labor. Also they formed associations together. It is worth noting that this is expected to create a social structure with high integration.

In historical memory level, we examine folk manuscripts such as *The Annals of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth*. These texts can integrate multi-ethnic cultures and build unified framework on spiritual plane. A common origin can be shared by different ethnic groups. Also they can share the lineage of sage kings. It is worth noting that the construction of this collective historical memory transcends differences in ethnicity, language, belief, and customs. It serves as a profound bond that can support a sense of community.

4.2 Historical Evidence of Ethnic Interaction, Exchange, and Integration in Dunhuang

Recently, research on multi-ethnic integration using Dunhuang manuscripts has developed and we can find many examples which can reveal that in the ancient Northwest China, different ethnic groups had deep interaction and mutual cultural influence which reflects the historical reality. Then, in 2025, Northwest Minzu University held a symposium on this topic. It is worth noting that scholars from over twenty universities and research institutions in country presented the historical landscape of interethnic integration and mutual learning in the Dunhuang from perspectives such as language, script, religion, art, and also social systems and we can see new developments in this field.

Huang Weizhong examined the Chronicles of Major Events in Tubo. It is worth noting that the Tubo calendar system and temporal conventions incorporated elements from Central Plains calendrical framework. Also its administrative institutions together with military system can be seen to influence Hexi region and this demonstrates that cultural exchange in both directions can be found in the historical documentation between these regions [8]. Sun Bojun studied Western Xia inscriptions at the Mogao Caves. These inscriptions depict scenes where various ethnic groups excavated caves and practiced Buddhism. Also they made offerings during the Western Xia period so we can see how different communities can develop shared cultural identities through religious practices. Bai Yudong analyzed Turkic official titles. It shows how nomadic grassland culture and Central Asian culture, together with Central Plains culture, can interweave within this system and they formed a cross-regional civilizational community.

The evidence suggests that ethnic interactions in Dunhuang region were not simply one-way Sinicization. It is worth noting that assimilation by non-Han cultures did not dominate this region, and instead, we can observe a long-term mutual learning and coexistence here. This process is stable and has profound influence. Various ethnic groups formed close connections in economic and social dimensions. In fact, cultural aspects are also intertwined with these relations, and at the same time, they together helped advance the historical evolution of Chinese national community.

4.3 The Conceptual Shift From the “Distinction Between Chinese and Non-Chinese” to the Notion of “Unity Between Chinese and Barbarians”

Traditional Confucianism discussed the 'distinction between Chinese and non-Chinese', and it emphasized cultural hierarchies and set up boundaries between internal and external spheres, and ritual and music were used as the criteria, so this view can be found in official discourse. It persisted in Central Plains dynasties. However, Dunhuang is border society. There is multi-ethnic coexistence and deep cultural integration there. In fact, such views lacked suitable practical foundation. They could not dominate. Instead, a more inclusive concept of 'unity between Chinese and non-Chinese' emerged. It is reflected in folk historical narratives.

We can see that “The Annals of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth” does not directly discuss Sino-foreign relations. However, its narrative logic can embody an orientation that transcends ethnic opposition. In fact, it includes cultural elements from frontier regions and foreign lands into ancient Chinese historical framework, and we can observe that it avoids deliberate distinctions between internal and external hierarchies while diverse cultures are integrated through a shared historical continuity that connects different ethnic groups together. During the rule of the Guiyi Army regime, political practices adhered to the official calendar of the Central Plains. Also, cultural policies embraced customs of various ethnic groups. Such governance approaches can solidify the concept of “the unity of China and the barbarians” as prevailing social consensus at the time, and it is expected to show how political practices that use the Central Plains calendar and cultural policies that embrace various ethnic customs can work together in the regime.

We examine the conceptual shift from “distinction between Chinese and non-Chinese” to “unity between Chinese and non-Chinese peoples”. It does not mean we abandon cultural subjectivity. The adjustments should keep the core of Chinese civilization, embrace cultural differences, respect diverse forms, and unite people through shared historical memory and cultural identity. In fact, this transformation is expected to be the practical manifestation of Chinese civilization's spirit of “harmony in diversity” in frontier regions and it can provide intellectual resources for supporting a sense of community among the Chinese nation.

4.4 The Historical Accumulation of the Consciousness of the Chinese National Community

We examine Dunhuang's cosmological narratives and related social documents. It is worth noting that community sense of the Chinese nation had some foundation in medieval period.

The dissemination of shared historical memory can advance. In fact, the Records of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth is a folk historical manuscript and can be seen as a typical case, because it extends lineage of Chinese ancestors and emperors to grassroots communities across border regions, and at the same time diverse ethnic groups can share a common historical narrative through this text, and it lays foundation for community identity.

We examine cultural identity model with openness. Dunhuang's folk narratives integrate Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and diverse ethnic cultures. While we keep core foundations of Central Plains culture and we take elements from the local communities and other ethnic groups at the same time, the model can support a unified cultural identity with pluralistic features. It is worth noting that this approach can avoid the problem of monocultural dominance and ethnic divisions can be reduced.

It is worth noting that a stable social foundation of ethnic interdependence has existed in the region for a long time. In Dunhuang, various ethnic groups are integrated in areas such as production, daily life, beliefs, and also marriage, and this shows high degree of social structural interconnection that can provide support for cultural identity and a sense of community.

These three elements can reinforce each other. Also, their effects can accumulate over time. It is worth noting that the sense of community among Chinese nation is not a product from modern construction, and instead it should be viewed as a cultural reality that has taken root and become deeper throughout the long history so we can say it is a historical result.

5. The Contemporary Value and Practical Implications of Dunhuang's Folk Creation Narratives

5.1 Theoretical Implications of Community Consciousness from the Perspective of Dunhuang Philosophy

In recent years, the study of Dunhuang philosophy has made steady progress. Scholars now examine theoretical essence of Dunhuang culture from ontological and axiological perspectives and they try to extract its core ideas so that the results can be used as a reference for building Chinese national community. Fan Peng proposed the concept of “Dunhuang Philosophy as General Ontology.” He emphasizes that pluralistic integration and inclusiveness are fundamental characteristics. In fact, through various forms such as art, literature, religious beliefs and other expressions, this culture demonstrates an inherent logic of mutual interaction, fusion and unity among its elements, and this logic can help us understand how the culture developed over long historical periods. Also, the results can be used as a reference for theoretical construction of Chinese national community from historical philosophical view [9].

The Annals of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth includes the spirit of “interdisciplinary integration”. In fact, we can see the ideas and symbols from diverse sources are not assembled together and they are connected within shared historical framework, and this can in principle form a unified system of identity which has flexibility. This thinking approach uses integration and avoids opposition and conflict, so it can provide some theoretical reference for contemporary discussions on relationship between unity and diversity and it should help us study coherence and inclusivity.

5.2 The Significance of Building a Shared Spiritual Home for the Chinese Nation

We can trace the value of shared spiritual homeland for Chinese nation to folk creation narratives. These are important part of traditional culture with long history and we can use Dunhuang culture as typical example. It is worth noting that they embody historical memory. Also the spirit of integration is included.

Physical evidence shows that multiple cultures can exist together without necessarily causing division, and harmonious coexistence can be achieved through shared historical identity. Such relics show the characteristics of the Chinese civilization. It keeps an open attitude towards outside influence while core unity is maintained. In fact, these examples can be used as a reference for building cultural confidence today. We examine relevant content at grassroots level, and it is worth noting that we can reconstruct dissemination pathways of shared historical memory while we emphasize the need for historical education approaches that can resonate with everyday life.

The resources on community consciousness preserved in Dunhuang manuscripts are organized in systematic way, we can use these materials to help improve all ethnic groups' sense of belonging and also their identification with Chinese culture, which should solidify the historical foundation of shared spiritual homeland. It is worth noting that this effect can be observed.

5.3 Practical Implications for Strengthening the Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation in the New Era

Dunhuang's historical experience offers multifaceted insights for strengthening the sense of community among the Chinese nation today.

Cultural identity is base for these works. The Dunhuang region can keep stable for a long time. This is because people there share historical memory and cultural identity, which can unite different people and bridge ethnic divides and in fact in new era this can help us to build community. Cultural identity should be seen as the core foundation. Also, we can strengthen education to promote China's excellent traditional culture and revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture as well.

We should keep principle of diversity within unity and mutual learning. In fact, Dunhuang culture keeps its vitality for a long time because it follows a philosophy that puts unity first but also accepts diversity, and it upholds main position of Chinese culture while respecting the special cultural features of all ethnic groups. Now ethnic affairs work should also follow this approach. We can put various differences into unified framework and we keep unity based on respecting these differences.

We should continue to promote interaction between ethnic groups. Also, exchange and integration between them can be improved. Dunhuang's history can show us that community sense cannot emerge by itself and it is cultivated through long-term daily interactions between people from different backgrounds who live in same area and communicate with each other. It is worth noting that establishing a social structure and community environment that are interwoven can support the cohabitation, joint learning, collaborative work, and shared enjoyment among people of all ethnicities and this is expected to be the basic approach to strengthening this sense.

We should give priority to preservation of grassroots historical memory and its guidance. The Dunhuang folk historical manuscripts can have good performance because they have close connection to local communities. Also, they are easy to spread. In new era, we can try to develop new methods for historical education. We tell stories about Chinese national community in formats that the public can accept and this can help ensure sense of community is built in people's hearts.

6. Conclusion

We examine the folk historical manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang Library Cave, and *The Chronicles of Emperors Since the Creation of Heaven and Earth* is one important example that we should look at carefully because it shows how people wrote history in that period using simple stories that everyone can understand. These texts use creation narratives and genealogical accounts. They can establish a historical identity system in grassroots society of medieval northwestern frontier regions. It is worth noting that this system integrates diverse cultures from different ethnic groups living in the border areas and it can maintain the unity of Chinese civilization even when the local culture in the northwestern frontier is very different from what we see in the Central Plains region. The texts are centered on the lineage of sage-emperors of China. They blend Buddhist cosmological concepts with Taoist religious elements, and they include multi-ethnic cultural factors from border areas. This gives rise to an identity framework. The framework combines the centripetal force of Central Plains culture with regional cultural inclusiveness, which means it can attract people to the center while also accepting local traditions and customs from different ethnic groups living together in the same area. This framework can reinforce political allegiance to Central Plains dynasties. Also, it can adapt to the social reality of multi-ethnic coexistence. In fact, this shows how the multi-ethnic unity of the Chinese nation can emerge historically within grassroots society when different ethnic groups live together in the northwestern regions and share the same political loyalty to the central government while keeping their own cultural traditions.

We examine Dunhuang's folk creation narratives. In fact, these stories can show that the sense of community in Chinese nation is not a new phenomenon. It should be seen as a natural outcome from millennia of interaction and exchange among various ethnic groups, together with their cultural accumulation that lasted for long time and Dunhuang is a typical frontier region. Many cultures converge here. The identity-building processes reflected in the folk literature provide insights for scholars who want to understand formation mechanisms of this collective consciousness from grassroots perspective, and at the same time it can enrich the historical significance of pluralistic unity theory in the Chinese civilization.

From today's view, Dunhuang manuscripts embody integration spirit and inclusiveness concept, and they also keep community tradition. These characteristics can provide reference for strengthening the sense of community among Chinese nation. Also we can build a shared spiritual home for all Chinese people. It is worth noting that we examine the historical trajectory of cultural integration across multiple ethnic groups in Dunhuang, and we look at resources related to community consciousness in the folk documents. This helps deeper integration between Dunhuang studies and ethnological research. Also it can provide historical and academic foundations for ethnic affairs work in new era, and the development of Chinese national community is expected to advance at the same time in theory and practice.

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Conflicts of Interest

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