

Forging a Strong Sense of Community of the Chinese Nation through Shared Historical Memory——An Empirical Study Based on Yazhou, Hainan

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Abstract: This paper takes the residents of Yazhou, Hainan as the object of empirical research to explore how to forge a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation through shared historical memory. As a place with a long history of multicultural integration on Hainan Island, Yazhou's historical evolution demonstrates the weaving process of multiethnic shared memories. The paper analyzes the role of Yazhou's historical memory in shaping the sense of community of the Chinese nation. Through questionnaire surveys and data analysis, the study finds that Yazhou residents show a relatively high degree of recognition of shared historical memory. Based on this, the paper proposes to activate historical memory and deepen cultural identity through approaches such as cultural inheritance and empowerment by modern technology, thereby providing practical references for forging a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation.

Keywords: shared historical memory; forging a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation; Yazhou, Hainan

1. Introduction

Memory is a psychological reflection of past experiences in the human brain, specifically referring to the encoding, retention, and reproduction of what has been perceived, experienced, or imagined. Halbwachs was the first to endow the concept of collective memory with sociological connotations, emphasizing the social nature of memory. In his view, memory arises from the collective; that is, people can only generate recollections when they participate in concrete social interactions and communications.^[1] Subsequently, Connerton pointed out that the shared memory shaped by a group through various rituals is not merely the sum of the private memories of individual members but belongs to the group itself.^[2] Assmann reexamined the viewpoints of Halbwachs and Connerton, defining Halbwachs's collective memory as "communicative memory" and elevating Connerton's social memory to "cultural memory." Cultural memory, with the cultural system as its subject, transcends the individual level. This is because memory is not confined solely to the domain of language and text but exists broadly across various cultural carriers, including material carriers such as museums and cultural relics, as well as intangible carriers such as public festivals and rituals. With the aid of these cultural carriers, a nation or a culture is able to realize the intergenerational transmission of tradition.

To forge a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation, it is essential to emphasize and strengthen historical education of the Chinese nation and the inheritance of collective memory. In recent years, academic research on shared memory, identity, and the sense of community of the Chinese nation has been on the rise. Scholars Chen Lipeng and Zhang Liping employed SC-IAT experiments to explore the role of collective memory in promoting the identity of the Chinese nation,^[3] while scholars Lu Shujian and Liu Yanping investigated the logical mechanism between red memory, as a special form of shared memory, and the forging of a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation.^[4] There has been considerable theoretical research on cultural identity and the forging of a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation. For instance, scholar An Beijiang noted that cultural identity and historical culture constitute the foundation of forging a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation.^[5] However, existing studies mainly focus on exploring common patterns, with relatively few analyses and theoretical interpretations of regional cases. Therefore, building on existing research, this paper employs the theory of "shared memory" within the psychology of the Chinese national

community as its analytical framework, focusing on Yazhou in Sanya, a region inhabited by multiple ethnic groups, to explore pathways for cultivating a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation.

2. The Historical Evolution of Yazhou, Hainan

Yazhou, as one of the oldest counties in the history of Hainan, has since ancient times been a place of multiethnic and multicultural integration. It served as the political, military, economic, and educational center of southern Hainan Island and functioned as a link for maintaining unity among frontier ethnic minorities and promoting civilization and progress in minority regions. In the thirty-third year of the First Emperor of Qin (214 BCE), after the unification of Lingnan, the Qin dynasty established the commanderies of Nanhai, Guilin, and Xiang; Hainan Island was placed under the jurisdiction of the outer boundary of Xiang Commandery. Xiang Commandery governed present-day Guangxi, Guangdong, and Hainan, representing the Qin dynasty's attempt at effective control over the Nanhai region and marking the deepening of central authority in the southern frontier. During the Han dynasty, Zhuyi Commandery was the main administrative division of Hainan Island, and ancient Yazhou, as an important part of it, was not only an administrative center but also a crucial military and economic hub. "In the sixth year of Yuanding under Emperor Wu of Han, the Southern Yue was pacified. From Hepu and Xuwen, expeditions sailed southward into the sea and discovered a large island. The following year, in the first year of Yuanfeng, the territory was initially brought under control, and the two commanderies of Dan'er and Zhuyi were established under Jiaozhou."^[6] In the first year of Yuanfeng (110 BCE), Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty formally established the commanderies of Zhuyi and Dan'er on the island, thereby incorporating Hainan Island for the first time into the administrative territory of the central feudal dynasty. From then on, Hainan Island maintained close political, economic, and cultural ties with the Central Plains. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, with the strengthening of centralized authority, Han culture gradually expanded in the Yazhou region, integrating with the cultures of local ethnic groups such as the Li and Miao, thus laying the foundation for later multiethnic coexistence. In the Song and Yuan periods, Yazhou was placed under the jurisdiction of Jiyang Military Prefecture, a special military administrative system established to strengthen governance and defense of the island regions. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, under the prefectural system, ancient Yazhou underwent significant development, achieving notable accomplishments in politics, economy, and culture. Influenced by Central Plains culture, Confucian culture further permeated all levels of Yazhou society, with local officials and intellectuals playing important roles in education and cultural transmission.

The history of Yazhou is not merely a record of changes in administrative divisions but also a history of the weaving of shared memories among multiple ethnic groups. Forging a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation is a dynamic process in which cultural identity is continuously deepened. As the most profound form of identity, cultural identity is the essential prerequisite for all ethnic groups to embrace and internalize the sense of community of the Chinese nation and serves as the ideological foundation for promoting communication, interaction, and integration among ethnic groups.^[7] By excavating shared historical memories, refining them on the basis of the developmental trajectories of various ethnic cultures, and drawing spiritual nourishment from fine traditional culture, it is possible to construct a spiritual bond between individuals and the community, thereby awakening emotional identity and a sense of belonging among people of all ethnic groups.

3. The Psychological Characteristics of "Shared Memory" among the People of Yazhou

The historical memory of Yazhou in Sanya represents a condensed history of the formation of the community of the Chinese nation. This study adopts the Psychological Index Scale of the Chinese National Community to investigate the shared memory of the people of Yazhou regarding the community of the Chinese nation. Shared memory, as one of the dimensions of the questionnaire, consists of five items, including D1: the Tangshan earthquake and the Wenchuan earthquake are disasters that the Chinese nation cannot forget; D2: the Beijing Olympic Games is a grand event that propelled Chinese culture onto the world stage; D3: the humiliating treaties signed by the Qing government deepened the suffering of the Chinese people; D4: the Opium War marked the beginning of modern history in which the Chinese people endured extreme humiliation; D5: the return of Hong Kong in 1997 was a great victory for the Chinese people in safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity.^[8] SPSS 26.0 was used to test the reliability and validity of the shared memory dimension. A total of 547 valid questionnaires were collected, including 274 male respondents and 273

female respondents. In terms of age distribution, there were 144 respondents aged 25–34, 123 respondents aged 35–44, 109 respondents aged 45–54, 49 respondents under 24, and 47 respondents above 65.

3.1 Reliability and Validity Analysis

In the “Shared Memory Questionnaire” designed for this study, the reliability coefficient of shared memory is 0.810, and the validity based on standardized items is 0.810. The overall reliability is relatively high and meets the standards of psychometrics. Using SPSS 26.0 to test the KMO and Bartlett results of shared memory, the validity of shared memory was found to be 0.836, and the significance level of Bartlett’s test of sphericity was $p < 0.001$, indicating that the measurement results have a high degree of consistency with the content under investigation.

3.2 Overall Analysis of Shared Memory

The overall situation of shared memory among Yazhou residents is as follows:

Table 1 Overall Situation of Shared Memory (N = 547)

	Minimum value (M)	maximum value (X)	mean (M)	standard deviation (SD)
D1	1.00	5.00	4.51	0.70
D2	1.00	5.00	4.52	0.72
D3	1.00	5.00	4.42	0.76
D4	1.00	5.00	4.49	0.74
D5	1.00	5.00	4.52	0.74
collective memory	1.00	5.00	4.49	0.55

As shown in Table 1, the mean value of shared memory among the research subjects is 22.46 ± 2.76 , which is at a relatively high level, indicating that the people of Yazhou possess a considerable amount of shared historical memory and social memory.

3.3 Analysis of the Influencing Factors of Shared Memory among the Yazhou Group

This study takes demographic factors such as age and occupation, which may influence shared memory, as independent variables, and the scores of each item as dependent variables, in order to examine the characteristics of the shared memory of the people of Yazhou across different variables.

3.3.1 Characteristics of Shared Memory by Age

The results of the one-way analysis show that age has no significant effect on D1, D3, D4, or D5 ($p > 0.05$). For D2, however, shared memory is significantly influenced, with the mean value of the 25–34 age group being higher than that of other age groups. In D2, the mean value of the group under 24 years old is lower than that of other age groups. Regarding the item “The Beijing Olympic Games is a grand event that propelled Chinese culture onto the world stage,” the lower mean value among respondents under 24 years old is mainly due to differences in historical context, changes in the social environment, and shifts in media focus. In terms of historical context, during the period of the Beijing Olympic Games, grand celebrations were held across the country, with people taking to the streets, waving national flags, and cheering enthusiastically. Such firsthand experiences made their memory of this historical event more vivid and made it easier for them to connect it with the sense of community of the Chinese nation. By contrast, among respondents under 24 years old, most were born around 2008, and their memory of this event mostly comes from textbooks; therefore, the emotional resonance in their judgment of shared memory is not as strong as that of those over 24. With social development, the younger generation’s values have become more diversified, with greater emphasis on personal development and self-fulfillment, and their identification with collectivist values is relatively weaker. Under such circumstances, their perception of the sense of community of the Chinese nation embodied in major historical events such as the successful hosting of the Beijing Olympic Games is not as profound as that of older age groups.

3.3.2 Characteristics of Shared Memory by Occupation

The results of one-way ANOVA show that education level has no significant effect on D2 or D4

($p > 0.05$). For D1, D3, and D5, shared memory is significantly influenced, with employees of public institutions having higher mean values than other occupational groups, and students having lower mean values than other occupational groups. Analyzing the characteristics of public institution employees and students, it can be observed that the age of public institution employees is generally higher than that of students. Differences in cognitive development stages, social interaction and experience accumulation, as well as life priorities, result in lower scores for the student group compared to other occupations.

4. Pathways for Forging a Strong Sense of Community of the Chinese Nation through Shared Historical Memory

In the practical process of forging a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation, the exploration and inheritance of shared historical memory constitute an important pathway. As a fundamental cornerstone of national and cultural identity, shared historical memory carries the spiritual lifeblood and cultural genes of the nation. Yazhou, as a region with a profound historical and cultural heritage, should, in the practice of forging a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation, build on its unique historical and cultural advantages, fully consider the “shared memory” psychological characteristics of the local population, and explore a series of practical and operable pathways.

4.1 Cultural Inheritance as the Foundation for Constructing the Shared Memory of the Chinese Nation

4.1.1 Regular Hosting of Traditional Culture Seminars

Traditional culture seminars, as an important vehicle for the transmission and activation of historical memory, can integrate dispersed national memories into collective cognition at the community level through systematic and continuous cultural dialogue and historical narration. By regularly hosting traditional culture seminars, focusing on historical figures and events as core topics, shared historical memory can be deepened. This includes exploring Madam Xian’s contributions to incorporating Hainan under central rule and promoting the integration of Li and Han cultures, analyzing the impact of the Sui dynasty’s reward policies, leveraging the material carriers of Yazhou Academy, and excavating the role of folk beliefs in transmitting the concept of “Great Unity.” Around the culture of exile, the introduction of Central Plains culture and techniques by exiled officials and their promotion of educational and literary development in Yazhou are examined. The dissemination of Buddhism and architectural techniques by Jianzhen and the economic promotion through Huang Daopo’s cotton weaving technology, as well as Zhong Fang’s contributions to preserving educational traditions, are also explored. These achievements are transformed into popular science articles and lectures, allowing the public to remember the flourishing history of Yazhou’s economy and education and evoking resonance with shared history, thereby reinforcing the sense of community of the Chinese nation in multiple dimensions.

4.1.2 Cultural Inheritance through the Yazhou Academy “First Writing Ceremony”

Today, the Yazhou Academy has been restored and revitalized, serving as an educational practice base for forging a strong sense of community. The Shiyong Elementary School, located at the northwest of the Deputy General’s Office in the city, is recorded in the Gazetteer of Yazhou that in the thirty-fourth year of Guangxu, Prefect Feng Ruheng requested the old military training hall to be transformed for educating Li children. Since 2016, local scholars and folk organizations, with government support and driven by dedication and enthusiasm, initiated the first Yazhou Confucian Temple First Writing Ceremony, which has now become a new cultural landmark of Yazhou. The ceremony, carefully designed by Yazhou Academy for children entering elementary school, carries profound cultural and educational significance. During the ceremony, children dressed in Hanfu sequentially perform rituals including paying respect to Confucius, adjusting their attire, reciting classics, using cinnabar for enlightenment, drum striking to express aspiration, and practicing calligraphy. The ceremony embodies deep elements of Chinese cultural commonality, such as “paying respect to Confucius” and “reciting classics,” reflecting the shared value of “reverence for learning and education.” Yazhou Academy also illustrates the historical trajectory of Confucian culture spreading to frontier regions, revealing the continuity of the Chinese “Great Unity” ideology in history. During the First Writing Ceremony, innovations are integrated into the ritual content, such as designing specific drum rhythms combined with stories of various ethnic groups jointly resisting foreign aggression and building the nation, stimulating children’s sense of mission. Elements of minority cultures, such as Li

rattan weaving and Miao lusheng music, are incorporated to showcase the achievements of multiple ethnic groups in co-creating Chinese culture, vividly presenting the “unity in diversity” pattern of the community. The ceremony transforms historical memory into emotional identification, serving as a spiritual bond to consolidate national identity, and thus represents an effective pathway for forging a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation.

4.1.3 Community Participation in the Spring Festival Ancient City Activities

The Spring Festival Ancient City activities in Yazhou are among the important cultural events with widespread participation by local residents. By hosting traditional festival celebrations, folk performances, and handicraft exhibitions, Yazhou not only recreates historical scenes but also strengthens the cultural identity of community residents. Through collective participation, these activities evoke resonance with shared historical memory, further consolidating the sense of community of the Chinese nation. For example, dragon and lion dances, traditional opera performances, and other activities during the Spring Festival Ancient City events not only showcase Yazhou’s traditional culture but also enhance community cohesion through the reenactment of collective memory. This type of community-based cultural activity provides an important social foundation for forging a strong sense of community of the Chinese nation.

4.2 Empowering the Formation of Community Awareness through Modern Technology

Modern technology can overcome the temporal and spatial limitations of traditional memory transmission, simultaneously activating the contemporary vitality of traditional culture and providing participatory pathways for the younger generation to develop identification. Sanya, leveraging the cultural brand of Huang Daopo, has deeply integrated modern technology with the cultural tourism industry, innovatively creating a more vibrant approach to consolidating the sense of community of the Chinese nation, and promoting deeper emotional connections among ethnic groups through cultural experiences and shared values.

The State Council announced in 2006 that Huang Daopo’s textile techniques were included in the national intangible cultural heritage list. Her innovations advanced the development of ancient textile technology, and Sanya, as her hometown, possesses her cultural IP. The China National Textile and Apparel Council recognizes Huang Daopo as the “Founder of Ancient Chinese Textile Industry,” providing official endorsement for her cultural brand. Meanwhile, the Sanya High-Quality Tourism Development Action Plan (2021–2025) explicitly proposes “the establishment of a Huang Daopo Cultural Theme Tourism Zone,” incorporating it into key cultural tourism projects of the 14th Five-Year Plan, covering more than 5 square kilometers with an investment exceeding 1 billion RMB. The creative transformation of this cultural resource not only activates the economic value of historical memory but also, through cultural integration, emotional resonance, and shared values, becomes a vivid practice for consolidating the sense of community of the Chinese nation.

Sanya’s innovative development of the Huang Daopo cultural brand uses historical memory as the cultural foundation for constructing national identity. Relying on modern technological means, it establishes visualized and interactive dissemination pathways for historical memory, providing both theoretical support and practical pathways for consolidating the sense of community of the Chinese nation. While inheriting intangible cultural heritage and developing the cultural tourism economy, it also promotes deeper consolidation of the sense of community of the Chinese nation among ethnic groups through cultural experiences, emotional exchange, and value recognition, providing a vivid example of the creative transformation and innovative development of ethnic culture in the new era.

Conclusion

Shared historical memory constitutes a critical foundation for the formation of the sense of community of the Chinese nation. By deeply exploring and transmitting Yazhou’s historical memory in maintaining national unity, promoting cultural integration, advancing economic development, and fostering educational prosperity, it is possible not only to evoke emotional identification and a sense of belonging among all ethnic groups but also to provide a solid cultural foundation for consolidating the sense of community of the Chinese nation in the new era. The combination of cultural inheritance and modern technology offers new pathways and possibilities for the transmission and revitalization of shared historical memory. Historical memory can be transformed into emotional identification, using national identity as a spiritual bond, continuously reinforcing the sense of community of the Chinese

nation.

Fund Projects

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