

# *A Study on the "Jia Xian" Culture of Shemihu Village from Family-Nation Isomorphism Perspective*

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**Abstract:** Tujia "Jia Xian" culture is the combination of the Confucian thought of "Heaven, Earth, Sovereign, Parents, and Teachers" and the cultural tradition and mode of thinking with "white tiger" as the core. Based on the theory of cultural identity, this paper makes a deep description of the "Jia Xian" culture in ethnic minority areas, re-recognizes the contemporary value of the shrines in ethnic minority areas under the central idea of the cultural community, and focuses on exploring the excellent traditional Chinese culture contained in the shrines and how the idea of "family-nation isomorphism" affects the cultural identity of the local ethnic groups. It will provide a new practice path for building a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.

## 1. Introduction

The exploration and development of the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation is one of the ways to strengthen and forge the sense of community for the Chinese nation. The rich and colorful fine traditional Chinese culture has been jointly created by the 56 ethnic groups. From "Heaven, Earth, Sovereign, Parents, and Teachers" to "Heaven, Earth, State, Parents, and Teachers", "Jia Xian" culture undoubtedly stands as a magnificent blossom in the grand garden of the Chinese nation's excellent traditional culture. The shrines set up in the halls of the stilted buildings in Shemihu Village are the spatial expression of the "Jia Xian" culture, and their components contain rich connotations of Chinese traditional Confucian culture.

Shemihu Village is an administrative village in Baifusi Town, Laifeng County, Hubei Province. The topography of the region is characterized by a constricted north-south axis, while the east-west span is considerably broader, with elevated terrain to the northwest. It is located in the southeast of Baifusi Town, about 15 kilometers away from Baifusi Town, and about 65 kilometers away from Laifeng County. Shemihu Village is located on the south-facing slope of a mountain. It is connected with Hunan in the east and Chongqing in the west across the Zhiyong Pass. It is known as "one foot in three provinces". The villagers in the village are mainly composed of Tujia, accounting for 95% of the total population, more than 140 households, 702 people registered, 6 groups.

## 2. "Shrine" and "Jia Xian"

A shrine is a cabinet used by the people to worship gods or ancestral tablets. Shrines come in all shapes and sizes, usually found in ancestral halls, and are carved from wood. They are divided into

two purposes. One is used to place the God and Buddha statue, and the other is used to place the ancestral tablet. In the countryside, a shrine is also set up in the back wall of the main room to worship ancestors. "Laifeng County Annals" records: "Before liberation, where the large and influential families, have built ancestral halls, and a festival field, to worship ancestors. There are shrines to the family god in every main room." [1] In the village of Shemihu, locals refer to the "shrine" as "Jia Xian" (the ancestral tablet). In Shemihu Village, it consists of the hall name, the memorial tablet, the hall couplet, the incense burner, and the small high table under the shrine.

The hall name refers to the naming of different branches or divisions in the family, which is used to distinguish the family members of different families. The hall name of each family may be different due to geographical location, political conditions, and historical factors. The general family will write their own hall name in the shrine, indicating the identity and ownership of the family. In Shemihu Village, Peng is the prominent surname, and the hall name in the local shrine is Longxi Tang. According to local elders, their ancestor Xianglong Peng migrated from Jiangxi province in the late Tang Dynasty. This ancestral hometown has formed local knowledge in knowledge production and spread to the people through pamphlets. The memorial tablet is the most important part of carrying on the family name. Six characters are written in the center of the local memorial tablet in Shemihu Village: "Heaven, Earth, State, Parents, and Teachers Tablet", of which "Heaven, Earth, State, Parents, and Teachers Tablet" is transformed from the original "Heaven, Earth, Sovereign, Parents, and Teachers Tablet". "Heaven, Earth, Sovereign, Parents, and Teachers Tablet" is a microcosm of the traditional Confucian culture, which reflects the dominant royal power, the relationship between the family and the state in the patriarchal community, and the institutionalization and legalization of ethics in the traditional society. Because of its special status and role, since the Han Dynasty, whether in the court or in the folk, people have generally believed in the Kitchen God. In the view of the villagers of Shemihu Village, the hall couplet expresses the good wishes for the prosperity of the family and the peace of the family. The content of the hall couplet is not fixed, and generally chosen by the host family itself, reflecting the host family's own wishes. Incense burner is an indispensable part of the whole "Jia Xian", as it bears the important role of sacrifice. Every year and festival, villagers will insert three incense sticks in the incense burner, in this traditional form to express their reverence for ancestors. The small high table under the shrine plays the role of placing sacrificial items in the "Jia Xian", and the small high table is primarily used as an altar for ancestor worship, where offerings are made to honor deceased family members, so as to obtain the protection of ancestors and shelter future generations. It is generally not used for other purpose. After the New Culture Movement, the core shrine words of "Heaven, Earth, State, Parents, and Teachers Tablet" appeared.

### **3. Family-Nation Isomorphism: the cultural bond that condenses the sense of community of the Chinese nation**

Cultural identity theory holds that individual identity and belonging are formed to a large extent through identification with the cultural values, beliefs, and traditions that contribute to the group. As we all know, Mr. Fei Xiaotong put forward the differential mode of association when studying the rural structure in China. "In the traditional structure, each family does its own status as the center, and draws a circle around it, and this circle is the 'neighborhood.' Wine invitations are extended during joyous occasions, red eggs are sent when a child is born, and funeral services are provided to help encoffins and carry coffins. They are mutual aid organizations in life, but this is not a fixed group, but a scope. The size of the scope also depends on the strength of the center." [2] "When you put yourself in the water like a stone, the social relations you form with others do not stand on a plane like molecules in a group, but like ripples in water, they are pushed out in circles, pushed farther and

thinner." [2] In this way, everyone has a circle centered on himself. At the same time, they belong to a circle of people who are superior to them. We can see that the differential mode of association itself already distinguishes the center from the edge, the self from the other from the microscopic point of view. Then, we can further elaborate the characteristics of the center-edge theory in Chinese culture, which is the differential mode of association from the self to the other in the relative sense. The core of the differential mode of association of each villager in Shemihu Village lies in the "Jia Xian" culture presented by the shrine in the middle of the hall. At the same time, the "hometown" culture also contains the logic of the individual's continuous socialization in its differential mode of association network. Therefore, the function of traditional culture in individual socialization ultimately points to the community of different levels and the community of different levels of the Chinese nation.

As a part of the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, "Jia Xian" culture contains the idea of the family-nation Isomorphism, and has important cultural identity significance. Through the shrine, people can feel the relationship between themselves and their families and ancestors, and strengthen the identity of family-country culture. The "Jia Xian" culture is the link between the individual, the collective and the country. The "Heaven, Earth, State, Parents, and Teachers Tablet" in the shrine words has enriched the Confucian cultural connotation, and the thought of "the family-nation Isomorphism" strengthens the cultural identity of the people in the region, and plays an important role in the process of forging the community consciousness of the Chinese nation.

### **3.1 Shrines: an important carrier to promote the formation of the Chinese nation's sense of community**

As the epitome of traditional Confucian culture, shrines play an important role in promoting the formation of Chinese national community consciousness in minority areas. For the role of inheriting and carrying forward traditional culture, shrines, as the symbol and carrier of Chinese traditional culture, contain rich history and traditional customs. Through shrines, people can have a closer relationship with their ancestors, form a consensus among groups, and strengthen the identification and inheritance of Chinese national culture. To enhance the cohesion of the family and the kindred, the shrine is generally set in the center of the back wall of the family room, which is a place for family members to live together. Through festivals and other activities, people formed a common relationship of participation and mutual assistance around the shrine, enhancing the cohesion of families and kindreds. Regarding the role of building historical ties and cultural identity, shrines are carriers and places for people to worship their ancestors, as well as ties between people and past history and culture. In the cultural education of shrines, people feel the connection between themselves and the history of the Chinese nation, strengthen their sense of identity and belonging to the Chinese nation, and form common cultural beliefs and identities. What's more, in the role of promoting social harmony and national unity, the Confucian cultural connotation of the shrine has the role of social norms and social guidance, and can promote social unity and harmony in the society. Through the connection of sacrifice and hall number, the contact and interaction between social members are strengthened, the cultural consensus of the community is formed, and the cohesion of the community is promoted.

### **3.2 "Family-nation isomorphism": to regulate people's morality and codes of conduct**

As a symbol of Confucian belief, the shrine words "Heaven, Earth, Sovereign, Parents, and Teachers" and "Heaven, Earth, State, Parents, and Teachers Tablet" embody Confucian thoughts that emphasize individual dedication and loyalty to the country and that individuals should work hard for the interests of the family and the country. Such values of loyalty and dedication can further promote people's concern for the collective interests of the Chinese nation. Enhance people's sense of

community. By emphasizing individual responsibility to society, individuals should actively participate in social affairs, care for others, and contribute to social development. This sense of social responsibility can inspire people to actively carry out social construction, while also providing them with a sense of accomplishment and belonging within this process. The concept of "family-nation isomorphism" in the Confucianism is one of the fundamental elements of the excellent traditional Chinese culture. "The foundation of the world lies in the nation, the foundation of the nation lies in the family, and the foundation of the family lies in the individual." [3] The idea of "family-nation isomorphism" embedded in shrines carries different connotations as it evolves with the times. When exploring the cultural connotation behind shrines, they play a considerable role as the carrier of emotion between "family" and "nation". At the same time, as a part of folk belief, shrines also play a great role in social education and social norms. The Confucian culture embedded in the shrines has the potential to educate and guide people's behavior, standardize their words and deeds, and contribute to the construction of a harmonious new rural society. Secondly, they give people an opportunity to alleviate tension and to express their emotions. The villagers of Shemihu Village put the portraits of their deceased relatives on the shrine to express their deep feeling.

In the new era, the concept of "family-nation isomorphism" is the inheritance and development of the values of "loyalty to the monarch" and "patriotism" in the traditional Chinese Confucian culture. It has evolved into the Chinese dream of loving the motherland, being loyal to the motherland, and building the motherland to achieve the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Such concepts and values guide the life practices of Chinese people, regulate their behavior, and help them to form a correct moral outlook and code of conduct. The concept of "family-nation isomorphism" in the shrine embodies deep patriotic sentiments, emphasizing personal loyalty and love for the nation. Through the process of socialization, individuals are influenced by this concept, enabling them to develop a strong sense of family honor and strong patriotic feelings, care about the nation's development, and actively contribute to the country. This emotion of "family-country" makes the individual, family and country unite, instilling a sense of social responsibility and patriotism in individuals, while shaping the moral concepts and codes of conduct to guide their behavior.

### **3.3 Inherit the concept of "family-nation isomorphism" and strengthen historical memory and cultural identity**

As a cultural symbol of Chinese traditional culture, shrines have symbolic significance. By offering sacrifices to ancestors, and transmitting cultural heritage and traditional values, shared family memory and identity are preserved and passed down, with the shrine serving as a symbolic embodiment of ancestral reverence and cultural continuity. The Confucian thought of the unity of family and country and the family-nation isomorphism depicted in the shrine words "Heaven, Earth, Sovereign, Parents, and Teachers" and "Heaven, Earth, State, Parents, and Teachers Tablet" plays an important role. It makes the one's love for the family and the nation, identity and sense of belonging strengthen by linking the values of family and nation. The reason why Chinese President confidently stated that "Of the core socialist values, patriotism is the most profound, most fundamental, and most enduring" lies in the widespread presence of a national consciousness shaped by the family-nation isomorphism. Realizing the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has been the long-cherished wish of the Chinese nation since modern times. Under this common aspiration, a sense of community of the Chinese nation with patriotism as its core has been formed, and the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation have worked together to write a new chapter in the new era.

As an important part of the shrine, the hall name contains a long history of family memory and rich cultural connotation. It represents the historical origins of the family, serves as a distinguishing marker for different family members, acts as an important means for individuals to trace their roots

and honor their ancestors, and functions as a cultural symbol of family harmony. As a carrier to identify members of different families, the hall name is not merely a code or designation, it is an crucial factor in enhancing family cohesion and strengthening the sense of identity among family members throughout the long history of the family. As a basic clue to trace the roots and ancestors, the hall number in the shrine is the symbol of the family, which is used to show the honor and reputation of the family. In the traditional society, the status of a family is closely related to the prestige of its hall name. A well-known hall name can earn respect and recognition in social interaction, further enhancing individuals' sense of belonging and identity within the family. Longxi Hall, the hall name of the prominent Peng family in Shemihu Village, traced its origins to ancestors who migrated from Ji'an, Jiangxi Province. The existence of this hall name allows people to trace their roots and affirm their family's heritage. The hall name in the shrine carries forward the values and moral codes of the family. Through the hall name, these values are passed down from generation to generation, with family members being influenced by them throughout the process of intergenerational transmission. This fosters cultural consensus within the family and strengthens the cultural identity of its family members.

As a carrier of both family and traditional culture, the shrine serves as a symbol of the family, emphasizing the social identity among its members through offering sacrifices to ancestors and hearth gods. By participating in these sacrificial ceremonies together, family members can strengthen their sense of community. Each element of the shrine carries rich traditional cultural significance, which is continuously shaped and enriched through the intergenerational transmission within the family. This process fosters the cultural identity and sense of belonging among family members. As a key aspect of traditional culture, shrines also embody the historical memory and identity of the Chinese nation. Through ancestor worship and cultural inheritance in shrines, people in ethnic minority areas honor the contributions of their ancestors and strengthen their sense of belonging to the Chinese nation. This process of historical memory and identity transmission, along with the formation of the 'family-nation isomorphism' concept, contributes to the development of a strong sense of community within the Chinese nation.

#### 4. Conclusion

Chinese traditional culture has a long history, extensive and profound. Excellent traditional culture continues to play a significant role in modern life, profoundly influencing people's daily lives. As a key component of China's splendid traditional culture, shrines are imbued with deep meaning. They serve not only as carriers of family spiritual beliefs but also as embodiments of social and historical memory. At present, fostering a strong Chinese national consciousness emphasizes the shared interests, common values and collective goals of the Chinese nation, while promoting ethnic unity and social stability. Through a thorough exploration of the connotations of shrines in minority areas and the national culture they embody, it is evident that rural shrines, as a integral part of traditional culture, strengthen the sense of identity of ethnic minorities with Chinese culture. Moreover, they promote the formation of a shared sense of community within the Chinese nation through cultural symbols and sacrifice ceremonies held at the shrines. Shrines play an important role in strengthening the centripetal force and cohesion of the Chinese nation. Therefore, in the new era, it is essential to properly recognize and value the existence of shrines. Guided by the cultural superpower strategy, we should reinforce the inheritance and dissemination of shrine culture, while further promoting the concept of "family-nation isomorphism" embodied within these shrines. Besides, we should fully leverage the role of shrine culture in folk beliefs, providing new practical insights and a excellent traditional cultural basis for fostering a deep sense of community within the Chinese nation. At the same time, the application of the shrine culture's social functions offers valuable experience for

China's modern national development and grassroots social governance.

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