

The National View in Ancient Border Control Policies in Southwest Ethnic Regions of China

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Abstract: In ancient China, the policy of border control in the southwestern ethnic regions constituted a key frontier governance strategy in Chinese history. This policy has profound significance for the governance of the southwestern border, maintaining national unity, and promoting ethnic unity. Digging deeper into the evolution of national consciousness in the frontier policies of southwestern ethnic regions is equally valuable for tracing the historical development of the Chinese national community consciousness.

1. Ethnic Policy and National View

In ancient Chinese, "guo" or "bang" originally referred to cities or the boundaries of urban territories, which later evolved into the fiefdoms of feudal lords. Due to the hereditary nature of territory, it is combined with "family" to form the compound word "state", which refers to a hereditary dynasty established by a specific family, which is different from the modern concept of "state". After the unification of the six states by the Qin Dynasty, "state" no longer referred to the territories of the feudal lords, but to the unified state. After the Han Dynasty, Confucian culture emphasized the "homogeneity of family and state", and "state" began to refer to a whole country. For example, Liu Xiang of the Western Han Dynasty mentioned in "Shuoyuan": "Only those who can stabilize the country and benefit the people", emphasizing the unity of family and state, which is similar to the concept of modern nation states.

In the context of modern Chinese, the meaning of the word "state" matches the Western concept of "state", and its definition is mainly influenced by European political theories from the 16th to the 19th century. In the mid-19th century, this concept began to gradually spread from Europe and America to China. Jonathan Haas summarized two theories about the origin of states: one is the conflict theory, which advocates that the formation of states is necessary to respond to internal conflicts within social systems; The second is the fusion theory, which holds that the birth of a country is driven by the need for social cooperation.^[1] Marx gave a classic definition of the state in "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State": "This society is trapped in insoluble self contradictions, divided into irreconcilable opposites and unable to break free from them. In order to prevent these opposites, namely classes with conflicting economic interests, from eliminating themselves and society in meaningless struggles, there needs to be a force that appears to be above society, which should ease conflicts and keep them within the scope of 'order'; this force that arises from society but is increasingly detached from society is the state."^[2] Therefore, the state can also be seen as a force that maintains social unity, eases conflicts, and unites society. The national view

generally refers to the cognition and understanding of the nature, function, structure, and relationships between the state and individuals, as well as between the state and the nation.

Ethnic policy is the sum of a series of guidelines, principles, and measures formulated by the state to handle ethnic relations, safeguard the rights and interests of all ethnic groups, maintain national unity, ease conflicts, and unite society. The essence of ethnic policy lies in balancing the relationship between the "diversity" of various ethnic groups and the "unity" of the whole country. Our country's ethnic policy has always followed the national view of respecting differences, embracing diversity, and strengthening "unity". The ancient Chinese concept of a unified nation originated from the need to control ethnic conflicts and was an important political concept for safeguarding the interests of the ruling class. The concept of the state also indicates that society is divided into opposites and difficult to break free from due to unresolved self contradictions. Since ancient times, our country has been searching for a force above all ethnic groups to ease conflicts and maintain order in order to prevent the destruction of ethnic groups in meaningless struggles due to conflicting interests. Therefore, we need to establish a unified country. In order to establish a unified China, the ethnic policies of China's past dynasties undoubtedly gained legitimacy, coupled with the rule of virtue, which could form a consensus among the various ethnic groups of the Chinese nation. This consensus is a concentrated reflection of the power within a large country. The tradition of China's ethnic policy is not only conducive to solving temporary practical problems, but also to achieving the long-term social integration and national development goals of the Chinese nation. The socialist national policy of China inherits the fine traditions of ancient national policies and is also an important component of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. It embodies the sense of community of the Chinese nation and is a key support for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

2. The Evolution of Border Control Policies in Southwest Ethnic Regions

In ancient China, the policy of border control in the southwestern ethnic regions constituted a key frontier governance strategy in Chinese history. Its core lies in achieving effective management and control of border ethnic groups by the central dynasty through various means such as politics, economy, and culture.

2.1 The Origin and Development of the Border Control Policy

The origin of the policy of border control can be traced back to the internal and external service system of the Shang Dynasty. The Shang king, as the co ruler, directly governed the central area (internal service), while the external service was managed by local rulers appointed by the Shang king, and the internal and external services protected each other. After the establishment of the Zhou Dynasty, faced with the resistance of the Yin people and the invasion of the four barbarians, the concept of "under the world, there is no royal land" was established, and by enfeoffment of local ethnic groups to become vassals in foreign areas, they were required to govern the local ethnic groups according to their customs, further developing the policy of frontier control.

The policy of border control during the Han and Tang dynasties began to mature. There were roughly three ways in which the Han Dynasty managed the border areas: establishing prefectures and counties for direct management, establishing vassal states for indirect management, and setting up protectorates to govern various tribes in the Western Regions, as well as the Xiongnu, Wuhuan, Xianbei, and other tribes. The large-scale implementation of the system of frontier control in the Han Dynasty began during the reign of Emperor Wu of Han, who used means such as marriage alliances, tribute, and mutual trade to control local tribes.

The system of frontier prefectures and states in the Tang Dynasty was formed during the process

of westward expansion, with a relatively complete management system. The governors and commanders of prefectures and states were appointed by the leaders of border ethnic groups to handle specific affairs, and their positions could be hereditary. The Tang Dynasty controlled the border areas through political, economic, cultural, and military means, ensuring the stable development of the border areas and achieving national unity.

With the development of the policy of frontier control, it had a profound and multifaceted impact on ancient China. Firstly, it strengthened the central government's control over the border areas politically. The policy of border control achieved effective governance over the border areas by appointing ethnic minority leaders as local officials, strengthened the central government's control over the border areas, and maintained national unity and stability; At the same time, the policy of border control also promotes ethnic integration, retaining the original forms of social organizations and management institutions in the local area, promoting communication and integration among various ethnic groups, and advancing the development of a unified multi-ethnic country. Secondly, it promotes border development economically. The policy of border control has facilitated the development of border areas, strengthened the economic ties between border areas and the mainland, promoted economic development in border areas, and facilitated economic and cultural exchanges. Especially through economic activities such as mutual exchange and tribute, the policy of border control greatly strengthened the economic ties between the central government and the border areas, promoted cultural exchanges, and weakened the heterogeneity between the central government and the border areas. Thirdly, the policy of border control also promoted the dissemination of Han culture, facilitated the exchange and integration of multi-ethnic cultures, and formed a pattern of multiculturalism; Of course, the policy of border control also respects the cultural traditions of ethnic minorities in the border areas, promotes cultural exchange and integration between different ethnic groups, and maintains cultural diversity. In addition, the military impact of the policy of border control cannot be ignored. The policy of frontier control through appeasement reduced the cost of using military means to control border areas, and at the same time, border ethnic groups became a reserve force for the dynasty's military resources. The policy of border control, through a combination of military control and appeasement, effectively maintained stability in border areas and prevented rebellions and unrest.

2.2 The Evolution of Border Control Policies in Southwest Ethnic Regions

The southwestern ethnic regions have been a key component of the diverse and integrated pattern of the Chinese nation since ancient times. On this vast land, the relationship between the central dynasty and the ethnic groups in the southwest border is complex, and the policy of frontier control, as a key means of ancient central government governance in the southwest border, deeply reflects the changes in the concept of national governance of the border and the gradual improvement of ethnic policies.

The policy of border control in southwestern ethnic regions first emerged during the Qin and Han dynasties. At that time, the central dynasty established prefectures and counties in the southwestern region, and appointed local ethnic minority leaders as officials, granting them certain autonomy to stabilize the border areas.^[3] This policy reflects the central dynasty's governance philosophy of "governing according to customs" in border areas, and also reflects the tolerance and flexibility of the national view towards border areas at that time.

With the passage of time, the policy of border control in southwestern ethnic areas further developed during the Tang and Song dynasties. During the Tang Dynasty, the central government established multiple border states in the southwest region, with local ethnic minority leaders serving as governors and implementing autonomy. This policy not only strengthened the connection

between the central dynasty and border ethnic groups, but also promoted stability and development in border areas. During the Song Dynasty, the policy of border control was further refined, granting greater autonomy to ethnic groups in the border areas through the establishment of systems such as chieftains.

During the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, the policy of border control underwent significant changes in the southwestern region. During the Yuan Dynasty, the central government attempted to fully bring the southwestern region under the direct rule of the central dynasty by using the southwestern barbarians as prefectures and counties. However, due to the complexity of the geographical environment and the diversity of ethnic cultures in the southwestern region, this policy did not achieve the expected results. In the end, the Yuan Dynasty had to adjust its strategy by establishing a chieftain system, with local minority leaders as chieftains, and implementing indirect rule.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the chieftain system was further improved and developed in the southwestern ethnic regions. During the Ming Dynasty, the central government granted certain autonomy to ethnic leaders in the border areas by establishing institutions such as chieftains and pacification bureaus, while strengthening control over the southwestern border regions. During the Qing Dynasty, the central government gradually transformed the chieftain system into a system of demotion officials through policies such as "returning land to exile", strengthening the central government's direct rule over border areas.

3. The Change of National Concept in the Border Control Policy of Southwest Ethnic Regions

In the implementation of the policy of frontier control, the concept of the state played a crucial guiding role. It not only reflected the governance philosophy of the central dynasty towards the country's borders, but also demonstrated its ability to accommodate and integrate multi-ethnic settlement patterns. The evolution of the policy of frontier control is not a static process, but rather a dynamic adjustment based on the actual situation in border areas and the needs of the central dynasty. This adjustment not only reflects the governance wisdom of the central dynasty, but also reflects the recognition of the importance of border areas in the national view. It can be said that the evolution history of the policy of frontier control is also a history of changes in the central dynasty's view of the state. From the inclusiveness and flexibility of the Qin and Han dynasties, to the flexibility and stability of the Tang and Song dynasties, and to the direct and indirect combination of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, these changes all reflect the continuous adjustment and improvement of the central dynasty's governance philosophy for border areas. The evolution of the policy of frontier control mainly reflects the change of the national concept from two aspects: first, the evolution of the policy of frontier control reflects the transformation of the concept from a "world" state to a nation-state. Under the concept of a "world" state, the central dynasty pursued the rule of vast territories, and the policy of frontier control was an important means to achieve this goal. With the development of history, especially in modern times, China has gradually transformed from a "world state" to a nation-state, and the policy of border control has also evolved into a more direct and effective way of governance in this process. On the other hand, the implementation of the frontier policy reflects the idea of a multi-ethnic unified country. Through the policy of border control, the central dynasties of various dynasties incorporated ethnic minorities into the national management system, promoting exchanges and integration among different ethnic groups and consolidating the unity of multi-ethnic countries.^[4]

The formation and development of the national concept in the frontier ethnic areas of Southwest China not only affect the formulation and implementation of policies, but also profoundly influence the development trajectory of border ethnic areas.

Firstly, from the perspective of the national perspective, the policy of border control reflects the authority and control of the central dynasty over the ethnic regions in the border areas. By establishing the dominant position of the central dynasty in politics, economy, and culture, national unity and ethnic solidarity were ensured. This authority and control are not solely reliant on military force, but rather achieved through institutionalized means such as regular tribute and reward systems to effectively manage and control border ethnic groups.

Secondly, the policy of border control also reflects tolerance and respect for multiculturalism. In the implementation process, the central dynasty fully considered the cultural differences in the southwestern ethnic regions, allowed and respected the cultural customs of different ethnic groups, and avoided conflicts and disputes caused by cultural conflicts. This pattern of multicultural coexistence not only promotes communication and integration among various ethnic groups, but also lays a solid foundation for national unity and stability.

Furthermore, the national perspective in the policy of border control is also reflected in the development and protection of ethnic minority areas in the border regions. The central dynasty promoted the economic and social development of the southwestern ethnic regions by establishing administrative institutions, dispatching officials, and promoting advanced production technologies.^[5] At the same time, by establishing military strongholds and border defense facilities, the security and stability of border areas have been effectively protected, creating a peaceful and stable living environment for local residents.

In short, the policy of border control in southwestern ethnic areas, from its initial construction in the Qin and Han dynasties, to its development in the Tang and Song dynasties, and finally to its maturity and transformation in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, not only reflects the continuous adjustment and improvement of the central dynasty's concept of border governance, but also marks the evolution of the national concept from "the world" to a nation-state. The implementation of the frontier policy not only promoted stability and progress in border areas, but also deepened the unity and identity between the central dynasty and border ethnic groups, providing valuable historical experience for future generations in handling ethnic relations and border governance. The national concept reflected in the policy of border control in southwestern ethnic areas not only demonstrates the wisdom and strategies of ancient China in national governance, but also provides valuable inspiration and reference for modern China's ethnic policies and border governance. Exploring the national concept in this policy in depth can help us gain a deeper understanding of ancient Chinese governance concepts and provide historical references and theoretical support for contemporary national governance. The evolution of the frontier policy in the southwestern ethnic regions vividly demonstrates the changes in the central dynasty's national concept. During this process, the central dynasty continuously optimized its governance concepts and strategies to adapt to the specific conditions of border areas and the needs of national development. This adaptive adjustment not only promotes stability and prosperity in border areas, but also consolidates the unity and identity between the central dynasty and border ethnic groups.

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