

A Study on the Culture and Values of the Westward Migration Festival of the Sibe Ethnic Group in China

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Abstract: The Westward Migration Festival presents the image of the patriotic historical feat of the Sibe people's westward migration to Xinjiang and garrisoning of the frontier through sacrificial ceremonies such as the sacrifice of *Karun* and the public sacrifice of *Tibet*, as well as celebratory activities such as the *Zhulun Hulanbi*, the *Beilun* dance, the archery competition, and the goat-carrying competition. Its cultural space reproduces the historical memory of the ethnicity, illustrates the patriotic dedication of the ethnic groups, the mentality of harmony and coexistence, and the sense of self-reliance and self-existence, and plays a role in enhancing the cultural memory of the ethnic and consolidating the consensus of the ethnic culture. Through the benign interaction of festivals, the ideological foundation is laid for the construction of the Chinese ethnic community consciousness in the western border areas, the value norms are provided, and the social foundation is stabilized.

Keywords: Sibe ethnic group of northeast China; Westward migration festival; Chinese ethnic community consciousness

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1. Introduction

The Sibe people are one of the ancient ethnic groups originating in the northeast region of China. During the Qianlong period, they accomplished the great patriotic historical feat of moving westward to Xinjiang to settle and garrison the frontier and made indelible contributions to the maintenance of the unity and defense of the motherland and the development of the western frontier. The Westward Migration Festival is an ethnic festival of the Sibe people to commemorate the patriotic historical feat of the westward relocation. Through the sacrificial ceremonies such as sacrificing to *Karun* and *Tibet*, as well as the celebratory activities such as *Zhulun Hulanbi*, *Beilun* dance, archery contest, and goat-carrying contest, the Sibe people have made a present-day celebration of their westward relocation to Xinjiang to settle down in the past, and have made great contributions to safeguarding the unity of the motherland by defending and developing the western frontier. The foundational history of the Sibe people's westward migration to Xinjiang to settle and develop the western

frontier is now being memorialized. The Westward Migration Festival is the most important manifestation of the cultural memory of the Sibe people, allowing the recollecting group to consolidate its identity by remembering the past ^[1]. In this way, the festival is an opportunity for the Sibe people to realize the importance of their cultural memory ^[2]. The festival has also become an important cultural bond that unites ethnic identities and strengthens the Chinese nation's sense of community.

2. Patriotic dedication: the ideological foundation of the ethnic community

The Westward Migration Festival is an ethnic festival commemorating the historical feat of the Sibe people's patriotism and its ceremonies and activities are the remembrance and inheritance of this patriotic dedication. The main ceremonies of the Westward Migration Festival include the worship of *Karun* and the public sacrifice of *Tibet*. *Karun* is a kind of defense and management facility, but for the Sibe people, not only does *Karun* play an important role in social security, production, border construction, and territory formation but more importantly, it also carries the history of westward migration, and the patriotic spirit of the Sibe people. Therefore, the Sibe people worship *Karun* with a grand ceremony, which reflects the Sibe descendants' recognition of the idea of loyalty to the country and realizes the value of Sibe patriotic dedication to family and national sentiments. It was said that *Tibet* is worshipped because he dug the Qapqal canal, the life river of the Sibe people in Xinjiang. The Sibe people do not worship heaven, ghosts, and gods, instead, they worship heroes who inherit the patriotic spirit. Hence, ceremonies such as the sacrifice of *Karun* and the public sacrifice of *Tibet* at the Westward Migration Festival are not used as symbols of looking back at a past event but as homogeneous remnants. Through the maneuvering of past events on a sacred site, differences in time are eliminated, unveiling a reality that is deemed as real and true every year ^[3]. Furthermore, the history of the Sibe people's westward migration to Xinjiang to settle and garrison their borders has also been continuously reinforced.

Building a strong sense of identity within the Chinese ethnic community will strengthen national cohesion and unite the country ^[4]. Patriotic devotion is a national ideal rooted in the hearts of the Sibe people. The ceremonies and celebrations of the Westward Migration Festival harbor this national ideal, emphasizing the ideological demand for great unity of territory, politics, and culture. The publicity and promotion of the festival are conducive to stimulating the enthusiasm of the people of all ethnic groups in the Western areas to construct a sense of Chinese ethnic community.

3. Harmony and coexistence: the value of ethnic community

After the Sibe people moved to Xinjiang, they fought against their environment and fate with an open mind, and in the process, they adhered to their own culture while tolerating the cultures of other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, and eventually adapted to the new natural and social environment. The Sibe Westward Migration Festival is characterized by activities that not only uphold the culture of their ethnic group but also reflect the absorption and tolerance of other cultures. For example, the *Zhulun Hulanbi* was originally a popular storytelling method among the Sibe people living in the Neng River Valley of Heilongjiang. After moving westward, this cultural phenomenon has had a profound impact on the Sibe society in Xinjiang. Not only did it popularize the Confucian ideas of loyalty, filial piety, propriety, and righteousness, but it also facilitated the development of the Manchu language in the process of copying and translating *Zhulun*. This also facilitates the widespread of the Chinese traditional culture, preservation, and development of the national script, and also for the enhancement of national cohesion.

The *Beilun* dance and the goat-carrying competition, on the other hand, reflect the Sibe people's

tolerance of the cultures of other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. In the early days, the Sibe people living in the Daxing'anling Mountains in northeast China survived mainly by fishing and hunting, and at that time, many of the dance movements in the *Beilun* Dance imitated animals. For example, the Sokoto Fire Beilun expresses the wine culture, and the Salute dance which expresses respect for elders by bowing, shrugging, and bending the knees has been added, popularizing the *Beilun* dance. Goat-carrying was originally a popular athletic activity among ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, but after the Sibe people moved westward to Xinjiang, they incorporated it into their activities, which made it possible for this activity to appear on the day of the Westward Migration Festival.

The Sibe people did not lose their cultural characteristics in the cultural collision with the ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, which illustrates cultural perseverance. At the same time, they have also absorbed the cultures of other ethnic groups with an open mind, diversifying their culture, which illustrates cultural tolerance. This shows mutual tolerance, seeking common ground while reserving differences, and coexistence among the ethnic groups. The cultural individuality of harmony and coexistence is not only the survival wisdom of the Sibe people but also the value criterion of the Chinese sense of community. Under the perspective of Chinese ethnic community consciousness, symbiosis can be understood, in essence, as the production of material and spiritual wealth, the sharing of living resources, and the development results by all ethnic groups in the community, thus promoting the common development of individuals and the community^[5]. The festivities of the Westward Migration Festival reflect the value of harmony and coexistence, which is in line with the inherent pursuit of a better life for all ethnic groups and is conducive to deeper interaction and communication among all ethnic groups in the western border areas. This aims to promote harmony and unity to develop a pattern of pluralism and enhance the sense of community.

4. Self-improvement and self-existence: the social foundation of community in China

According to the records of Sibe genealogical books, the westward-moving troops set off from Shengjing and arrived at Zabulharant of the Mongolian People's Republic after 4 months. During the migration, the Sibe people have been through harsh weather and the inconvenience of transportation. This process not only tested the physical strength and willpower of the Sibe people but also tested their spirit of tenacity, hard work, self-reliance, and self-existence.

After arriving at Ili in Xinjiang, the Sibe people, to defend their motherland's territory from invasion, stationed in Qapqal, defended *Karun*, garrisoned the station, and assumed the heavy responsibility of defending the frontier. They fought relentlessly against the reactionary forces, regardless of the cost and without fear of sacrifice, and greatly contributed to defending the territory of Ili. At the same time, they were faced with the difficult situation of small habitable land, food, and water. To survive, the Sibe people, led by the national hero Tubert, overcame unimaginable difficulties with amazing perseverance in extremely harsh environments. The Qapqal canal was built, and the people harvested their crops and earned their living, which led to the development of villages and fields in the ancient wasteland, thus making outstanding contributions to the development and construction of the Northwest frontier.

In the battle of defending territorial integrity and conquering the harsh environment, the Sibe people have demonstrated the spirit of perseverance, self-reliance, and self-survival. Through the excavation and utilization of historical resources, the festival implements rituals and celebrations, integrates the spirit of self-improvement and self-survival of the Sibe people with the festival, promotes the inheritance and development of the consciousness of self-improvement and self-survival of the ethnic areas in the western frontiers, strengthens the

psychological quality of the people in the western frontiers in resisting the provocations and interferences of the unlawful forces from both inside and outside the country, and enhances creativity and cohesion of the Western frontiers. This effectively alleviates the problems of production, development, and cohesion, and played a role in maintaining the stability and unity of the Western border areas ^[6].

5. Conclusion

The Westward Migration Festival is a reconstruction and innovative development of ethnic culture by the cultural elites and local governments of the Sibe people in Xinjiang. The festival is held with the value of family and ethnic sentiment as the core, through the excavation, inheritance, and utilization of historical resources. From the perspective of ethnic culture, the ethnic cultural memory links the members of the ethnicity closely together and realizes the blood connection and solidarity among them ^[7]. The cultural space of the Westward Migration Festival not only focuses on the historical feat of the Sibe people's westward migration and garrisoning of the border, but also embodies the patriotic dedication, the mentality of harmony and coexistence, and the sense of self-improvement and self-survival of the Sibe people. This recreates and strengthens the historical memory of ethnic identity, consolidates the ethnic cultural consensus, and links members of the ethnicity closely together. The festival atmosphere and cultural accumulation contribute to the inheritance and development of the spirit of westward migration and the enhancement of ethnic cohesion, thus enhancing the sense of community of the Chinese nation in the Western border areas.

Through a series of commemorative ceremonies and celebrations, the Westward Migration Festival has built bridges of communication for the realization of the unity and development of the Western border areas. Through positive interaction, it has laid the ideological foundation, provided value guidelines, and solidified the social foundation for the construction of the sense of community of the Chinese nation in the western border areas.

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