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## An Analysis of the Ethnic Identity and Cultural Memory Space of Chaoshan Ethnic Group in China Based on the Theory of Cultural Memory

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**Abstract**

Chaoshan ethnic group is a Han ethnic group distributed in Chaoshan area of eastern Guangdong Province in China. Based on the theory of cultural memory, this paper analyzes the formation and evolution of ethnic characteristics of Chaoshan ethnic group from the perspective of different ethnic identity and explains the historical process of the existence of Chaoshan ethnic group. The cultural memory space links the content, form and function of Chaoshan cultural memory with the physical space to achieve the purpose of Chaoshan ethnic identity and cultural continuity. This paper studies the interpretation of Chaoshan cultural memory in society by using the cultural memory hermeneutics model and reveals that Chaoshan cultural memory is embodied in the ternary system of ethnic group, cultural memory space and ritual.

**Keywords:** Chaoshanese, cultural memory, cultural memory space.

### 1. Introduction

Chaoshan people refers to a Han nationality with Chaoshan dialect as its mother tongue. Maurice Halbwachs proposed that memory can only be generated when interacting with others <sup>[1]</sup>. Cultural memory is far beyond the horizon of communicative memory <sup>[2]</sup>. German sociologist Jan Assmann (1997) proposed the concept of "cultural memory" and introduced "memory" into the field of cultural studies <sup>[3]</sup>. Cultural science regards memory as a concept closely connected with culture, history and other categories <sup>[4]</sup>. The memory of individuals is affected by their social and cultural environment, and the memory of individuals and groups is not only an important part of their identity as subjects <sup>[5]</sup>. Among them, cultural memory space represents a breakthrough in the field of memory and embodies cultural memory as a cycle. Taking the social basis of Chaoshan cultural memory as the starting point, we further put forward the cultural basis of Chaoshan cultural memory. Chaoshan people have experienced a long history and become a group with unique memory. Therefore, based on the theory of cultural memory, the use of cultural memory space system will help better understand the development history and folk form of Chaoshan people.

### 2. Chaoshan ethnic identity

Ethnic identity refers to the recognition and emotional attachment of ethnic members to their ethnic affiliation and shows a kind of exclusion or separation through external objective characteristics <sup>[6]</sup>. Time and history are the most basic thinking dimension for human beings to pay attention to the existence of life and think about the existence of things. Reviewing the development history of ethnic groups along time, we can clearly observe that the study of Chaoshan ethnic memory follows the logic of linear time and many different ethnic identity theories constructed with time as the coordinate <sup>[7]</sup>. The ethnic identity of Chaoshan ethnic group is shown in the following aspects:

The first ethnic group identity is embodied in the fundamentalism, which believes that ethnic group identity mainly comes from people's fundamental emotions, which are original and natural, and are the original ties based on language, religion, race, clan attribute and territory.

The fundamental theory attaches great importance to subjective cultural identity factors, and the most basic feature of Chaoshan cultural identity is Chaoshan dialect. Language is a tool for human beings to think, express and exchange ideas, and also a carrier of cultural content [8]. Therefore, Chaoshan dialect is the external carrier and representation of Chaoshan culture.

The second ethnic group identity is reflected in the boundary theory. Ethnic groups are defined by "exclusiveness" and "attribution". The main reason for the formation of ethnic groups is their boundaries. Without boundaries, there is no connotation and characteristics of ethnic groups, let alone the interaction and identity of ethnic groups. It is precisely by limiting the boundaries of their own ethnic groups that ethnic group members learn to exclude others from learning themselves [9]. Compared with other regions in China where the clan structure has basically collapsed, Chaoshan still has a more traditional clan consciousness and a more developed clan system. Chaoshan clans began to appear in Han families in the northern region who have been fleeing the war and moving southward since the Qin Dynasty. During the Ming Dynasty, in order to resist the invasion of pirates, many large villages and forts were formed, and many large settlements with more than 10000 people appeared in Chaoshan rural areas. These large settlements greatly promoted the development of clan forces, and clan gradually became an indispensable part of people's lives. The identification of the third ethnic group is embodied in instrumental theory. The instrumental theory regards ethnic

groups as a political, social or economic phenomenon, and explains the formation, maintenance and change of ethnic groups through the competition and distribution of governance and economic resources. Unlike the fundamental theory, the instrumental theory emphasizes the situational nature of ethnic identity, the instability of ethnic identity and the rational choice of ethnic members. The instrumental theory of ethnic identity is characterized by its propensity to profit, easy to construct new ethnic memory and cater to the needs of ideology [10]. The formation of Chaoshan ethnic group is a long historical process, and even the Chaoshan ethnic group is changing constantly. For example, in the history of Chaoshan region, the opposition, ethnic transformation and mutual integration of Chaoshan ethnic group and Hakkas ethnic group.

### 3. The spatial representation of Chaoshan culture memory

In essence, cultural memory space is similar to the physical tools that objectively reflect cultural memory, such as ancient temples, ancient tombs, monuments, etc. Such auxiliary tools are usually called "cultural memory field". The rise, decline and marginalization of Chaoshan historical stories are part of the dynamic development of memory, and are also the key issues of memory research [11]. The spatialization of cultural memory is a cultural evolution process that links the content, form and function of cultural memory with the physical space, so as to achieve the purpose of local identity and cultural continuity [12].



**Fig. 1:** Ancestral halls and temples in Chaoshan area.

In 1989, Pierre Nora clearly pointed out in "Between Memory and History Les Lieux de Memorial": "The weaker the internal experience of memory is, the more tangible markers it needs external support and existence [13]." It can be seen that the field of memory actually refers to the external conditions for preserving memory. Pierre Nora opposes the use of productive perspective to think about memory, but emphasizes the consistency of memory and locks it into relevant places. Jan Assmann (2006)'s theory of cultural memory broke through the theoretical shackles of the field of memory. He believed that the two principles of repetition and the present era stipulated the way cultural memory handles memories [14].

The interpretation of cultural memory in society is bound to be a cycle [15]. The primitive cultural type of mankind is the product of the duality of man and nature. Human activities change the natural environment, and the change of the natural environment will react on human activities. The

cycle of repetition and willingness to act is a dead cycle of fixed original intention. Therefore, social groups use cultural mechanisms such as rituals and festivals to make them expect action in accordance with norms [16]. Chaoshan culture is rich in systematic symbolic elements, with externalization, objectification and specific experience perceived and passed on in people's lives, but it also generates new memories in different times, thus gaining and strengthening the cultural identity of the subjectivity of cultural traditions [17]. Chaoshan cultural memory is embodied in the ternary system of ethnic group, cultural memory space and ceremony (Figure 2). The presentation of the ceremony gives the collective members the opportunity to acquire or review the cultural memory of the collective, and thereby establish or consolidate their status as members of the collective. For the collective, it is also through the presentation of the ceremony to make their cultural memory constantly reappear and gain real

significance, and at the same time, it also embeds its culture and its culture into each member to maintain their identity

of the subject<sup>[18]</sup>.

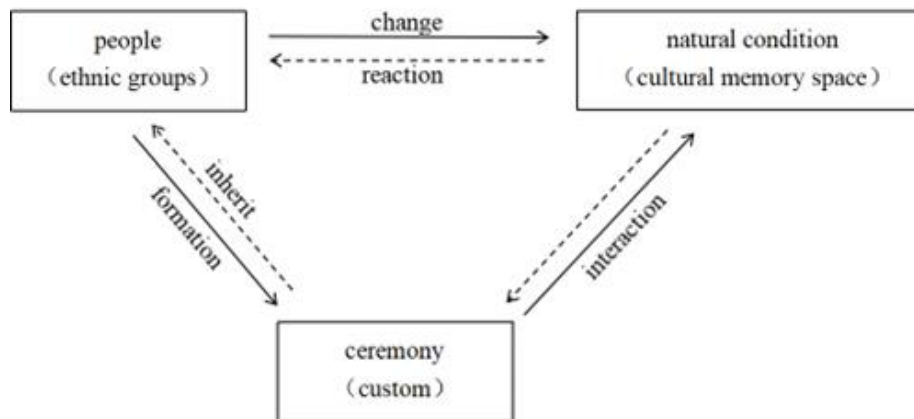


Fig. 2: Interpretation model of Chaoshan cultural memory.

#### 4. Conclusion

Chaoshan ethnic group culture is different from Guangfu ethnic group culture and Hakka ethnic group culture in Guangdong Province of China. It not only retains the essence of the ancient culture of the Central Plains, but also has unique ethnic characteristics in the region. It has a common cultural foundation, unique language and culture, the same cultural materials, unique folk customs, and even a whole set of cultural symbols and connected socio-economic background, as well as immigration culture, compatible culture Han nationality culture with open culture and other characteristics. The ethnic identity of Chaoshan ethnic group is not only the mutual recognition among the members of the internal ethnic group, but also the external representation and presentation of the ethnic image to seek coexistence and recognition at a broader level of society.

Chaoshan cultural memory space is characterized as a symbol with continuity, diversity and regionality, which is the objective reflection of material space to spiritual space through memory media, and the memory of historical form, value and emotion relying on the material world. The spatialization of Chaoshan cultural memory is a cultural evolution process that links the content, form, function and physical space of Chaoshan cultural memory, so as to achieve the purpose of Chaoshan ethnic identity and cultural continuity. The formation of Chaoshan cultural memory space is the result of the joint action of the three systems of material, human and spirit in Chaoshan region.

The existence of cultural memory as a way to implement the concept of interpretation means that social groups use the storage mechanism of cultural memory to seek norms to consolidate the identity of individuals in groups. Compared with other regions in China, Chaoshan culture has the characteristics of a ternary system of ethnic groups, cultural memory space and rituals.

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