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Naadam: A Vivid Practice of Ethnic Communication, Exchange and Integration from the Perspective of Intergroup Contact Theory

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Abstract

Allport proposed the Intergroup Contact Hypothesis, which posits that intergroup contact facilitates greater understanding of outgroups and, on this basis, reduces ethnic prejudices, playing a positive role in mitigating interethnic conflicts and tensions. Based on extensive empirical research, Allport outlined four optimal conditions for intergroup contact that promote positive outcomes among ethnic groups. For China, a multi-ethnic developing country, communication, exchange and integration among ethnic groups represent crucial avenues for enhancing mutual understanding and fostering interethnic friendships. Active interethnic contact and exchange strengthen ethnic unity and reinforce the centripetal force of the Chinese nation. This paper analyzes the Communication, Exchange and Integration among ethnic groups at the Naadam Fair in Inner Mongolia through the lens of the four optimal conditions for intergroup contact proposed by the theory of interethnic contact: equal status, shared goals, intergroup cooperation, and institutional support. The aim is to provide theoretical insights for the interethnic development of China's diverse ethnic groups and the construction of harmonious ethnic relations.

Keywords: Intergroup Contact, Communication, Exchange and Integration, Inner Mongolia, Naadam Fair, Allport

1 | Introduction

In 2010, Comrade Hu Jintao first proposed related discussions on the issue of "ethnic interaction, exchange, and integration." The interaction, exchange, and integration between ethnic groups develop based on China's ethnic policy of "all ethnic groups being equal." Developing the cause

of national unity and progress in China entails fostering harmonious coexistence, concerted efforts, and harmonious development among people of all ethnic groups across the country, with the aim of promoting the prosperity and revitalization of the socialist motherland, based on consolidating and developing socialist ethnic relations.[1] At the Central Ethnic Work Conference, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that "it is necessary to promote communication, exchange and integration among all ethnic groups, and to promote the unity and solidarity of all ethnic groups in terms of ideals, beliefs, sentiments and cultures, as well as mutual assistance and brotherhood." [2] The intergroup contact theory is a theoretical system gradually formed by Western researchers through further supplementing and explaining the limiting conditions and mechanisms of intergroup contact based on the intergroup contact hypothesis proposed by Allport. He believes that intergroup prejudice arises from the lack of sufficient information or the existence of erroneous information about one group towards another, and intergroup contact provides opportunities to obtain new information and clarify erroneous information. [3] In the field of inter-ethnic relations, the interaction and integration among ethnic groups facilitate the establishment of opportunities for mutual familiarity and connection between groups, and such opportunities provide positive conditions for the development of harmonious ethnic relations. Therefore, the main content of his intergroup contact hypothesis is that in order to reduce unnecessary conflicts arising from intergroup prejudice or increase understanding of out-groups, the primary means is to engage in contact with other out-groups besides one's own. He summarized the optimal conditions for intergroup contact into the following four points: 1. Equal Status: In intergroup encounters, all participating groups are considered equal, encompassing parity in personality, legal status, and individual rights and interests. Such equal footing fosters more productive interactions with outgroups. Additionally, interethnic encounters contribute to the development of a sense of ethnic equality, with both aspects reinforcing each other. 2. Shared Goals: Based on equal status, intergroup encounters collaborate through shared goals. Reducing biases arises from mutual engagement centered on common objectives, necessitating concerted efforts from both groups with positive attitudes and clear targets. Ethnic festivals or sporting events, such as the naadam fair among the Mongolian people, exemplify this well. The fair involves teams composed of members from different ethnicities working together with a unified goal to achieve victory. The accomplishment of this shared goal, in turn, indirectly promotes increased communication, exchange and integration between the two groups. 3. Intergroup Cooperation: Intergroup cooperation refers to the positive and constructive collaboration among individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds, rather than a zero-sum game where victory is determined solely by absolute wins and losses. 4. Institutional Support: Both groups must accept intergroup encounters that are endorsed by relevant authorities or legal frameworks, including support and encouragement from both official governmental organizations and non-governmental social organizations. Such sanctioned interactions tend to be more effective and productive. Since the advent of the intergroup contact hypothesis, researchers have universally demonstrated that intergroup contact can improve attitudes towards outgroups and reduce prejudice. Moreover, interethnic communication, exchange and integration

can be achieved through various means, with ethnic traditional festivals constituting a prevalent avenue for such encounters. The Naadam , a traditional festival widely celebrated among the Mongolian, Oroqen, and Ewenki ethnic groups in Inner Mongolia, Gansu, and Qinghai, serves as an exemplary platform for facilitating intergroup contact and promoting interethnic communication, exchange and integration.

Intergroup contact is one of the key methods to promote intergroup harmony and improve intergroup relationship.[4] Driven by the wave of globalization, the communication, exchange and integration among ethnic groups have increasingly become a central issue in constructing a pluralistic and harmonious society. Against this backdrop, fostering understanding and respect among different ethnicities has emerged as a focal point of attention across various sectors of society. Scholar Gu Jianjie employs intergroup contact theory to analyze the fundamental principles of the mixed dormitory model for ethnic minority and different nationalities university students, proposing its significance in promoting their healthy growth and interpersonal interactions. [5] Scholars such as Duan Yanbo and Gao Xiaobo propose the implementation of mixed class formation, mixed dormitories, and mixed teams, guided by the theoretical framework of intergroup contact, as a means to enhance the national identity of ethnic minority university students. [6] However, The Fair in Inner Mongolia, as a dazzling display of the Mongolian people's long history and splendid culture, not only bears the heavy responsibility of ethnic heritage but also plays an irreplaceable role in promoting mutual understanding and fostering friendship among people of all ethnic groups. Through this platform of the naadam, individuals from various ethnic backgrounds have the opportunity to experience each other's cultural charm through shared activities, thereby laying a solid foundation for the construction of harmonious ethnic relations.

2|The Naadam Fair from the Perspective of Intergroup Contact Theory

On July 14th, 2024, the vast Xilin Gol Grassland hosted a grand Naadam, drawing tourists, herders, and cultural enthusiasts from all corners of the globe to converge on this celebration of ethnic culture. Naadam Fair garnered significant attention from numerous domestic and international media outlets as well as scholars, underscoring its importance as a vibrant showcase of traditional Mongolian customs and heritage. Through their lenses and words, they disseminated the unique charm of Mongolian culture to every corner of the world. The hosting of the Naadam profoundly embodies the essence of the four optimal conditions for promoting contact and integration outlined in Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory: equality of status ensures that all participants engage in free and unbiased exchanges, fostering an environment devoid of prejudice and discrimination. This promotes mutual respect and understanding among diverse social groups, reinforcing the idea that all are equal in the pursuit of cultural appreciation. Common goals of promoting and preserving Mongolian traditional

culture serves as a spiritual bond connecting all participants. This enhances group cohesion and identity, fostering a sense of unity and purpose among those gathered. The government and relevant agencies provide robust institutional backing, ensuring the smooth execution of the fair and the safety of all attendees. This institutional framework guarantees the orderly progress of activities and contributes to a positive participant experience. Extensive intergroup cooperation and interaction not only in seamless collaboration during the preparation and execution of the event but also in deepening emotional ties and cultural exchanges among individuals from diverse backgrounds. Such interactions lay a solid foundation for harmonious coexistence and mutual development among ethnic groups, transcending traditional boundaries and fostering a more inclusive societal fabric.

2.1 Equality of Status: The Cornerstone Ensuring Communication, Exchange and Integration

The principle of equality of status is regarded as an indispensable cornerstone in the study of the deep-rooted mechanisms of inter-ethnic interaction and communication, and its academic and social importance is particularly noteworthy, since ethnic prejudice is a category relating to a specific group of people, which is not based on defining characteristics, but contains a large number of noisy attributes that lead to the devaluation and belittling of the group as a whole. [7] China has advanced a national policy of ethnic equality as a means of addressing the country's ethnic issues. This policy encompasses not only the equality of status among different ethnic groups, but also the equal rights and obligations of all ethnicities. The establishment of such an equal status enables the interaction, communication and integration of diverse ethnic groups. In the context of China's national policies, ethnic equality is not merely a political declaration; rather, it is a core principle enshrined in law and practice, with the objective of guaranteeing the non-discrimination of status among ethnic groups. It encompasses comprehensive equality across a range of dimensions, including political, economic, social, cultural, and other aspects. There is a particular emphasis on ensuring consistency in the enjoyment of rights and fulfilment of obligations among all ethnicities. On the basis of this foundation of equal status, the communication, exchange and integration among ethnic groups become feasible and serve as vital driving forces for the construction of a harmonious society. These processes facilitate mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation, which in turn lead to the strengthening of social cohesion and the promotion of shared prosperity. By adhering to the principle of ethnic equality, China strives to create an environment conducive to the flourishing of diverse cultures and the realisation of the aspirations of all ethnic groups. From the perspective of intergroup contact

theory, status equality serves not only as a prerequisite for fostering inter-ethnic interactions but also as a crucial factor in alleviating ethnic tensions and mitigating conflicts. In economically developed societies, the absence of status equality gives rise to an intensification of ethnic contradictions and clashes, thereby rendering the construction of harmonious ethnic relations an arduous task. The absence of equality can intensify feelings of disenfranchisement and resentment among ethnic groups, impeding the development of mutual trust and understanding, which are essential for the formation of a cohesive society. It is therefore imperative to ensure status equality in order to promote peaceful coexistence and foster positive inter-ethnic relations.

The Naadam Fair, an iconic event in Mongolian traditional culture, features traditional activities such as the "Obo Offering Ceremony" and the "Three Skills of Men" (horse riding, archery, and wrestling), which not only embody profound national cultural connotations but also serve multiple functions in modern society, including cultural heritage preservation, education popularization, entertainment, and communication. These activities serve as vital vehicles for transmitting Mongolian culture to future generations, fostering a sense of cultural identity, and promoting social cohesion through shared experiences and performances. The participants from various ethnic groups, regardless of their differing social backgrounds and cultural customs, share a crucial premise: equal status. This equality manifests not only in the undifferentiated rights and status of participation but also profoundly in the respect and understanding for each other's cultures. The Fair, as a unique platform for inter-ethnic interaction, relies on the foundation of equal status to facilitate the free flow of information, sincere exchange of emotions, and mutual borrowing of cultures. In doing so, it becomes an effective avenue for enhancing mutual understanding, promoting inter-ethnic communication, and fostering integration among different ethnic groups. This process not only enriches the practical cases of intergroup contact theory but also provides valuable experience and insights for constructing a harmonious and integrated society characterized by cultural diversity and coexistence.

2.2 Common Goals: The Driving Force Behind Communication, Exchange and Integration

The academic value of goal congruence as the core driving force for promoting ethnic interaction, communication, and integration is profoundly manifested in the comprehensive cultural event of the festival, which transcends the scope of a single traditional festival by integrating multiple functions such as folklore heritage, sports competition and tourism, thereby

becoming a comprehensive platform for showcasing multiculturalism and promoting inter-ethnic interactions. Allport posits that "the crux of the matter lies in the fact that contact must reach beneath the surface to touch deeper aspects in order to effectively reduce prejudice. Only those types of contact that lead people to work together on a common task have the potential to alter attitudes." [8] Within this theoretical framework, the common goals embodied in the naadam festival serve as a powerful bond that unites members of different ethnic groups. These common goals not only encourage participants to form a unified intention to cooperate, but also stimulate positive and constructive interactions during intergroup contact, rather than fostering a zero-sum, adversarial stance. This intergroup cooperation based on shared goals imparts a continuous driving force to the naadam, enabling members of various ethnic groups to deepen their mutual understanding and enhance emotional connections in the pursuit of a common vision.

In the arenas of the festival, competitors from different geographical regions engage in a common endeavour rooted in inter-ethnic cooperation. They unite under common aspirations and beliefs, face challenges together and celebrate triumphs together, fostering a deeper sense of camaraderie and mutual understanding. During this process, as communication deepens and cooperation strengthens, the boundaries between members of various ethnic groups gradually blur, replaced by an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation. This type of interaction and exchange guided by shared goals not only contributes to the reduction of ethnic prejudices and negative stereotypes but also subtly promotes the comprehensive development of political, material, and spiritual civilizations.

Therefore, the significant motivating role of goal congruence manifested in the naadam festival not only serves as a robust validation of intergroup contact theory but also provides a valuable practical example for promoting ethnic unity and deepening interethnic communication, exchange and integration. In promoting the harmonious coexistence of multiple ethnic groups, it is imperative to attach great importance to the establishment and realisation of common goals, as they serve as the crucial foundation for rallying people's hearts and inspiring momentum.

2.3 Intergroup Cooperation: The Profound Manifestation of Communication, Exchange and Integration

The concept of intergroup cooperation represents a significant and multifaceted phenomenon, encompassing a range of interactions, exchanges, and integrative processes. Its academic origins can be traced back to the intergroup contact theory, which has established itself as a foundational

framework within the field of social psychology. Although this theory has been widely applied in the analysis of interactions among diverse groups, it demonstrates unique explanatory power and value when elucidating the most intricate and crucial form of intergroup interaction, namely, ethnic relations. In the context of the naadam activities in Inner Mongolia, intergroup cooperation represents not only a normative aspect of these events but also a vivid footnote to cultural fusion and social development.

As the naadam activities continue to evolve and gain popularity, their forms and content have become increasingly diverse. This expansion has occurred in two distinct but related ways. Firstly, the traditional pastoralist gathering has been incorporated into the naadam activities, resulting in the emergence of new forms such as "Tourism naadam," "Family naadam," and "School naadam." Secondly, the activities have been adapted to suit the specific needs and interests of different groups, resulting in the creation of new forms tailored to specific contexts. This transformation reflects not only the adaptability and innovation of ethnic cultures in the face of changing circumstances but also the broadening and deepening of intergroup cooperation boundaries. The diversification of participants has extended beyond the sole pastoralist community to encompass farmers, urban residents, workers, and tourists from various industries and backgrounds, both nationally and internationally. This extensive participation has infused the naadam with renewed vitality and depth.

The naadam is not merely a feast of athletic competition; it is also a grand gathering for cultural exchange. This is achieved through the meticulous design of cultural and recreational activities, ritual processes, and the display of ethnic-specific elements. It adroitly incorporates the distinctive elements of daily life, customs, religious beliefs, and more from a multitude of ethnic groups, exemplifying the essence of Mongolian culture while fostering emotional exchanges and resonance among different ethnicities. This, in turn, serves to construct a framework of ethnic identity based on the sharing and understanding of culture.

In the context of modern society, while the activities inevitably carry certain political and economic functions, their role as a vital platform for the integration of grassland culture and tourism, as well as for national unity and economic development, has become increasingly prominent. Annually, during the seventh and eighth months, the naadam functions as a significant attraction, attracting thousands of tourists from distant locations who come to observe and engage in this cultural extravaganza. This facilitates profound interethnic cultural

exchanges and integration. As a result of the mutual influence and penetration among multiple ethnic groups across economic, political, educational, and other domains, the gradual establishment of an interethnic cultural identity represents the most profound manifestation of communication, exchange and integration. This process serves to reinforce the bonds of unity and integration among the various ethnic groups, while simultaneously establishing a robust foundation for the development of a socially integrated, diverse, and harmonious community.

2.4 Institutional Support: The Solid Foundation Underpinning Communication, Exchange and Integration

As an indispensable source of strength in promoting communication, exchange and integration among ethnic groups, institutional support requires an academic exploration that delves deeply into its multifaceted dimensions and far-reaching implications in the construction of harmonious ethnic relations. Theoretical frameworks from social psychology and policy science indicate that equal status contact between majority and minority groups pursuing shared objectives can potentially mitigate prejudice, unless such prejudice is deeply entrenched in an individual's personality structure. When such contact is institutionally supported (i.e., through laws, customs, and local social norms), or when it fosters a perception of shared interests and humanity among individuals, its effectiveness is significantly enhanced. [9] Institutional support, defined as an integrated system encompassing legal frameworks, social customs, and local norms, serves to provide a stable external environment for intergroup contact. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that such support significantly enhances the positive effects of such contact by guiding a clear understanding of shared interests and the universality of human nature.

Currently, China's national unity and inter-ethnic interactions have entered a new historical stage. The Central Ethnic Work Conference held in 2014 systematically elaborated on the concept of "Three Interactions," which emphasises that communication, exchange and integration are historical trends conducive to strengthening national unity and enhancing the cohesion of the Chinese nation.[10] This concept, not merely a profound summation of historical experiences, is also a scientific foresight into the future development of ethnic relations. It emphasizes the pivotal role of "Three Interactions" (Communication, Exchange and Integration) in reinforcing national unity and enhancing the cohesion of the Chinese nation. This principle has been established by the Party and the state as the cornerstone for promoting the harmonious development of ethnic relations, underscoring the profound recognition of the crucial function

of institutional support in facilitating the communication, exchange and integration among ethnic groups.

The "14th Five-Year Plan for the Construction of Public Cultural Service Systems", published in June 2021, mentions the integration of culture and tourism. In the section entitled "Boosting Rural Revitalisation through Cultural Prosperity", it calls for the pilot construction of ethnic and folk culture tourism demonstration zones and the promotion of the integrated development of rural culture and tourism.[11]In particular, the strategic deployment on the integration of culture and tourism and rural revitalization has provided broader spaces and policy support for cultural inheritance and inter-ethnic interactions in ethnic regions such as Inner Mongolia.The plan explicitly proposes to carry out pilot construction of ethnic and folk culture tourism demonstration zones and promote the deep integration of rural culture and tourism. This initiative not only facilitates the preservation and inheritance of national cultural treasures, including the Naadam Festival, but also promotes mutual understanding and emotional blending among different ethnic groups through the bridge role of cultural tourism.

The festival, as a time-honored cultural tradition of the Mongolian people, has witnessed not only the wisdom and resilience of the Mongolian people over nearly eight centuries of its inheritance and development but also served as a cultural bond connecting various ethnic groups. In 2006, the Xilin Gol League in Inner Mongolia successfully applied for the naadam festival to be included on the national list of intangible cultural heritage, an action that not only elevated the cultural status of the naadam but also ensured its comprehensive protection under national laws and regulations.This institutional recognition and protection provide a solid foundation for the continued prosperity of the fair in contemporary society and offer robust institutional support for ethnic communication, exchange and integration within Inner Mongolia and across the country. Against this backdrop, the Naadam Festival serves not only as a showcase for ethnic culture but also as a vital platform for promoting national unity and harmonious development.

3| Conclusion

Using the naadam in Inner Mongolia as a typical case, this paper has explored the theoretical logic and practical value of ethnic communication, exchange and integration from the perspective of intergroup contact theory.The research indicates that equal status, shared goals, intergroup cooperation, and institutional support are the key elements driving ethnic communication, exchange and integration .Specifically, as a mediating mechanism, intergroup contact effectively reduces prejudices based on misunderstandings and stereotypes and reduces the likelihood of intergroup conflict by promoting positive interactions among different ethnic

groups. As a result, it actively contributes to strengthening and consolidating the sense of community among the Chinese nation. In the context of the new era, China should continue to uphold and improve the system of ethnic policies, give full play to the guiding role of intergroup contact theory, and promote communication, exchange and integration . among various ethnic groups in broader and deeper fields, thereby contributing to the realization of the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.

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