



Cultural Confidence as a National Strategy: Significance and Construction

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Abstract: In the context of globalization, Western values keep expanding across the globe, maintaining their dominance. Domestically, the development of Chinese culture lags behind its economic growth. Globally, China has yet to develop a significant power of speech. Also, China's overseas image is not in line with its real strength. The introduction of cultural confidence, therefore, is a must move to tackle China's dilemma of international cultural communications and also an emergency measure to address a crisis of domestic cultural anxiety and identity. Cultural cognition, cultural communications, and cultural development are prerequisites for building and boosting cultural confidence. For the construction of cultural confidence, key actions include confronting the crisis of faith, conducting a self-examination of our culture, enhancing mainstream values, improving the compatible mechanisms, integrating traditional culture, and properly approaching Western culture.

Keywords: cultural anxiety; cultural confidence; national strategy

Culture is a pattern of existence unique to a group or nation and concerns the identity issue of "Who am I?" In *Patterns of Culture*, Benedict (1998) wrote, "In the beginning God gave to every people a cup of clay, and from this cup they drank their life." In the context of globalization, cultural communications, clashes, conflicts and integrations have become key features of international cultural interactions. In the light of the ever-changing complicated global landscape, major

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* Foundation item: This paper is a staged result of the "Studies on the Generation of International Influence of Contemporary Chinese Culture", a major project of National Social Sciences Fund (16ZDA219).

powers have all identified cultural construction as a key national strategy in a bid to improve the international influence of their own culture and occupy the commanding position in a regional or international cultural sector.

1. The national image of China overseas

Currently, China has seen significant improvement in its national image in the international community. Such improvement, however, still fails to live up to the Chinese people's expectations because the same content transmitted in the same approach may be received quite differently in different regions and countries. As President Xi Jinping has reiterated, China should enhance its capacity of international communications and keep competing for a stronger voice in the international arena. Improving the national image of China overseas remains a priority of the Chinese government. From November to December 2014, the Center for International Communication Studies under the China International Publishing Group (CIPG) carried out the third China National Image Global Survey. According to the survey, the description that "China is a country featuring rapid economic growth and high living standards" won the biggest recognition among overseas interviewees. However, some 45% of interviewees also believed that, "China is a country with a huge gap of wealth between the rich and the poor." When it comes to economic prospects, "only 6% of people surveyed thought the Chinese economy would decline and compared with developed and developing countries were more optimistic about China's development prospects." From 2008 to 2013, the US-based Pew Research Center completed a serial China-themed survey in 20 countries. The results revealed that the rise of China is widely recognized worldwide. China's social governance is also a much-talked-about issue among

Western countries. Again, according to CIPG's third China National Image Global Survey, interviewees from developed countries identified combating domestic corruption and social inequality as the most pressing concerns of Chinese society (GIPG, 2015).

The Chinese enterprises competing in the international markets have formed a key channel for the international community to learn about China. As revealed by the Chinese Enterprises' Overseas Performance Survey, these Chinese enterprises gained relatively higher recognition among the general public of Malaysia, Mexico and Russia. While recognizing the Chinese enterprises' contribution to local economies, they also thought these enterprises were faced with both opportunities and challenges. Judging from the third China National Image Global Survey, "An average 65% of overseas interviewees valued their diplomatic relations with China and had a high expectation for them. This figure indicated a slight year-on-year increase." Alongside China's rapid economic growth and rising international influence is the emergence of the "Chinese fever". It is in such a context that the Confucius Institute came into being, and has contributed significantly to global harmony and China's soft power. Yet, there is no shortage of doubts and misunderstandings of the Confucius Institute in some countries. Given this, more efforts should be made to empower faculty, enrich pedagogy and update text books. In terms of cultural symbol recognition among foreigners, natural resource symbols top the list, followed by symbols of Chinese lifestyle and national character such as tea, porcelain, and Confucius (Yu & Yang, 2015). However, there is a good deal of room for improvement in foreigners' conceptions of China's excellent cultural resources in humanity, art and philosophy. According to CIPG's third China National Image Global Survey, 57% of overseas interviewees accessed China-related information via local traditional media, while some 40% accessed it via local news media. Foreigners

preferred to learn more about traditional Chinese culture, economy and people's livelihood via Chinese media and people from other developing countries exhibited a strong interest in China's tech news. Online media have formed a major channel for overseas people to access information and see the world. Some 2/3 of interviewees acknowledged the Internet as their preferred channel to learn more information concerning Chinese culture.

From a macro perspective of global cultural development, Western powers are actively exporting their values to enhance their dominance, with some of them relentlessly permeating the rest of the world with their ideology and values. In general, powerful civilizations can exert their impact on weak ones; while the latter can do nothing but passively accept the thoughts and values of the former (Ouyang, 2014). Striking differences can be found between Eastern and Western civilizations. Such differences, however, should not be used to explain the conflicts between the two civilizations. Quite the opposite, they lay a basis for their complementation and integration. The Chinese culture advocates "harmony & integration," paying great attention to holistic appeals such as unity, moderation, kind-heartedness, justice and harmony. In the context of globalization, the contemporary value of traditional Chinese culture is increasingly highlighted, becoming an important ideological resource to defuse conflicts among multiple social entities, and even conflicts between man and nature. Given this, China should develop and enhance its own voice in the international arena as soon as possible and avoid mechanically applying the Western speech framework at the theoretic level to explain the reality of Chinese politics, economics and culture. Otherwise, "China will remain unable to effectively take advantage of the reasonable parts of the current Western system of cultural values and provide cultural value interpretations of its own, even if the Chinese system of cultural values is still mostly rejected by the West"

(Ouyang, 2014). While striving for material progress, China should also give full play to its humanism. As a major economic power, China must showcase its cultural confidence and tell China's stories to the rest of the world. More specifically, in an all-round way, it should demonstrate the unity of the Chinese people, their thoughts & spirits, and the environment, highlight the profoundness of Chinese culture, combine traditional Chinese values and life philosophy with those of the world, and secure international recognition of the Chinese ideology, culture and values.

Currently, the foreign communications system of China mainly comprises "one agency, two stations and two newspapers." One agency refers to the Xinhua News Agency; two stations refer to China Central Television (CCTV) and China Radio International (CRI); two newspapers refer to *China Daily* and *People's Daily* (Overseas Edition). There are a part of China's mainstream media specializing in news reporting on China for foreign audiences. Meanwhile, the China News Service (CNS), China International Publishing Group (CIPG) and Phoenix TV also send the voice of China to the rest of the world via various channels. In addition, with the rise of new media, mainstream media also attaches great importance to the use of online platforms to form an "intension-type" communications channel which provides information services to different target groups. Regarding foreign communication, China should ensure sufficient efforts in official reports to foreign audiences and at the same time extend the scope of international communications at the non-governmental level to create more room for its message. While consolidating the dominant role of relevant government authorities and specialized agencies in foreign communications, China should also give full play to effective people-to-people cultural exchanges and diplomatic activities to extensively promote international exchanges in various realms. During the process of foreign communications, China must "tell its stories in a vivid tone," rather than merely

“bringing out facts and reasons.” To this end, careful and thorough research in communications content and approach need to be conducted to avoid stereotyped conceptual promotions full of tired slogans and theories. Effective foreign communications also means respecting diversified cultural traditions and habitual thought patterns of different countries and regions, telling China stories in the preferred tone of the target audience, creating a share communications space, and enhancing mutual understanding.

2. Strategic implications of boosting cultural confidence

During the Two Sessions (NPC & CPPCC) in March 2014, President Xi Jinping participated in the Guizhou delegation’s deliberations, at which he stressed, “It is soft power that represents the core of a country’s comprehensive strength at the highest level and concerns the consolidation of a nation’s spirit; we must have full confidence in our socialist road, theories, system and, more importantly, culture, and introduce ‘cultural confidence’ and the other ‘three confidences’ as an organic whole.” In December 2014, President Xi Jinping visited Macao, where he attended a seminar themed “Traditional Chinese Culture and Contemporary Youth.” At the seminar, he particularly pointed out that cultural confidence was the basis for the other “three confidences,” (confidence in the path, theory, and system of socialism with Chinese characteristics) (Li, Yao & Li, 2016). On May 17, 2016, President Xi Jinping hosted the National Symposium on the Work of Philosophy and Social Sciences and delivered an important speech, profoundly expounding that. “Fundamentally, cultural confidence is the key to having firm confidence in the road, theories and system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, as cultural confidence is a more essential, deeper and more enduring power.” On July 1, 2016, President Xi Jinping delivered a speech at the 95th CPC

Anniversary Conference, stressing that “always staying true to our original mission and keeping moving forward means having firm confidence in the road, theories, system and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics, adherence to the Party’s basic line and carrying forward the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics.” On October 18, 2017, President Xi Jinping delivered a report at the 19th CPC National Congress, calling for a firm cultural confidence and a boost to socialist culture. From a perspective of national strategy, he proposed and reiterated cultural confidence, which highlighted China’s emphasis on the prosperity and development of socialist culture, demonstrated determination to forge a strong cultural power, and thus consolidated the cultural basis for the realization of the Chinese dream: the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Maintaining cultural confidence requires in-depth exploration, absorption and inheritance of the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation. To maintain cultural confidence, China should have a thorough understanding and interpretation of its excellent traditional culture and actively combine it with contemporary concepts and ideas to echo the call of the times and showcase the charm of Chinese culture to the world. Meanwhile, China should also wisely choose a right direction for the development of advanced socialist culture, foster and practice the core socialist values, and continue to promote China as a major civilized and responsible socialist country that stands tall in the East and even the world. Cultural confidence primarily concerns proper attitudes towards culture while cultural consciousness is about the right perspective with which to approach culture. Cultural improvement requires effective development ideas. These three points are interconnected and at the same time exhibit distinct characteristics. “Cultural confidence is a group, country or party’s full affirmation of the value and vitality of its own culture” (Yun, 2010). “Cultural consciousness” was



Fei Xiaotong

first proposed by Fei Xiaotong at the Second Senior Seminar on Social and Cultural Anthropology held by the Institute of Sociology and Anthropology, Peking University. It holds that people in certain culture and history must have sufficient knowledge about their culture, thoroughly understand its development and prospects, and intentionally reflect and construct their culture. The purpose is to respond effectively to globalization and to find solutions to interpersonal relationships. Cultural consciousness should not be understood as cultural conservatism, cultural conflict or even cultural hegemony. Instead, it is intended to promote cultural communications, cultural coexistence and cultural development. Fei Xiaotong concluded the development process of “cultural consciousness” as “every culture has its unique beauty; precious it is to appreciate the beauty of other cultures with openness; if a culture represents itself with diversity and integrity,

the world will be blessed with harmony and unity” (Qiu, 2012). The boost of cultural consciousness mainly includes an awareness and in-depth understanding of one’s own culture and a great sense of responsibility concerning cultural construction and development. Cultural confidence must be based on cultural consciousness. This will help avoid cultural hegemony and cultural arrogance while also being conducive to overcoming cultural inferiority and blind imposition.

The goal of cultural consciousness and cultural confidence is to achieve cultural improvement. “Cultural improvement means basing ourselves on reality, relying on our own strengths, highlighting our characteristics, exploring a cultural development path of our own, and building a socialist culture which targets modernity, the entire world and the future, and which belongs to all nations and the masses. Moreover, cultural improvement is expected to equip our culture with great influence, vitality, creativity and competitiveness. That is to say, it helps to build China into a major socialist country with a strong cultural influence.” For the sake of cultural improvement, China must gain the wisdom to choose a correct cultural path and direction, grasp the soul of its culture, and coordinately enable cultural creation, cultural communications, cultural sector development, as well as cultural talent cultivation in an all-round way (Qi, 2012).

3. Strategies and suggestions of boosting cultural confidence

In the context of globalization and informatization, Chinese society is faced with a huge transformation, which inevitably gives rise to cultural anxiety while promoting social progress and vitality. Culture is not just ideology that concerns conventions and accepted concepts, but also mode of production and lifestyle. Culture is not just part of the

social structure, it is also a key factor that influences society and individuals alike. Cultural differences can cause conflicts among countries across the global. On an individual level, one's psychological conflict and anxiety is closely related to the failure to adapt to a culture. Such inadaptation may result from the decline of traditional culture or the shock of an external culture, or the imbalanced development of one's own culture. There are scholars deeply worried about the current chaotic cultural sector stuffed with "inappropriate, vulgar and kitsch works." They believe such works can confuse the public, trigger chaos in aesthetic ethics and value orientations of a culture, and exacerbate moral disorientation. According to some scholars, the biggest challenge facing "cultural consciousness, cultural confidence and cultural improvement" lies in the capital logic that culture reduces to consumer goods. They also think the increasingly tough environment for humanists has a significantly negative impact on their production attitudes and modes (Duan, 2011).

Currently, cultural anxiety is mainly exhibited in aspects such as Chinese society's attitudes towards Western culture, its view of traditional Chinese culture, and the relationship between a culture's social benefits and economic benefits. In fact, cultural anxiety reflects a crisis in cultural identification. A country giving no recognition to its own culture cannot expect to develop cultural consciousness, or raise its cultural confidence. From a perspective of cultural sociology, cultural anxiety is the outcome of "cultural lag" which refers to a variety of disorders caused by development imbalance among different cultures (Zheng, 2012). Ever since the Reform and Opening-up, China has witnessed rapid economic growth and substantial development of a tangible culture and scientific technology. By contrast, its social system and concepts have lagged far behind. Its social system no longer fits in with the development of a socialist market economy; its organizational culture goes against market

principles; its socialist cultural construction struggles to catch up with the times; and many personal beliefs are already out of date. These can cause an imbalance in human environments, cognitions and behaviors, which can further intensify cultural anxiety. The rapid development of a mass culture should be attributed to the introduction of Western pop culture. Mass media in general, TV and the Internet in particular have successfully promoted mass culture in society. However, just as Postman put it, this era may descend to one without history (Neil, 2004, pp.178-179). Under the influence of mass media, people seem to care only about what is new, prefer to enjoy the moment, and are reluctant to review the past and embrace the future. It is difficult for excellent traditional culture, ethnic culture, elegant art and serious literature to gain much public attention. Yet, it is precisely from these cultural patterns, rather than mass culture, that a sense of community develops. The fading of such a sense of community prevents one from staying in the "community" and thus causes anxiety and depression.

The excellent traditional Chinese culture is arguably the Chinese nation's cultural gene, spiritual home, and never-ending source. Promoting the excellent traditional Chinese culture as an important means to practice core socialist values should not stay at the abstract conceptual level. Rather, it requires more concrete actions. To boost cultural confidence, it is imperative to interpret and carry forward the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation. Both cultural consciousness and cultural confidence require gradual cultivation in an appropriate environment. China needs to exhibit the charm of its culture to the world in its own words and carry out positive cultural interactions with other countries by creative means. The foreign communication mechanism of the Chinese culture requires continual improvement and further internal coordination between government authorities and private entities, and between the government and the market, and diversification of communication models.

China should further improve its ability to tell China stories, strengthen its voice on the global stage, and introduce Chinese culture to foreign friends through communication.

Regarding cultural confidence building and improvement; cultural cognition is a prerequisite for building cultural confidence, cultural communications is a necessary condition for improving cultural confidence, and cultural development is the basis for boosting cultural confidence. Cultural cognition includes rational cognition of traditional culture, correct evaluation of contemporary culture and reasonable predictions of future culture. Cultural communication on an equal footing helps expand the international influence of Chinese culture and combats narrow mindedness. Gaining a stronger voice is key to boosting cultural confidence. The development of culture means giving full play to people's creativity and then enhancing cultural competitiveness and appeal (Huang, 2012). The establishment of cultural confidence is based on certain qualities like cultural tolerance, adaptability and reflective capacity. Being all-inclusive, the excellent traditional Chinese culture lays a solid basis for boosting cultural confidence. While exhibiting strong adaptivity, it also facilitates self-reflection and examination and encourages daring innovation to constantly update Chinese culture. Rational reflection prevents culture from standing still, indulging in self-admiration and developing a sense of inferiority. Moreover, it provides a clear picture of the pros and cons of a culture (Qiu, 2012).

Globalization both fosters cultural diversity and communications and gives rise to conflicts. How to boost cultural confidence against this background is a key issue facing China today. It is necessary for China to rationally confront crisis of faith, conduct self-examinations of our culture, enhance the cultivation and practice of core socialist values, and properly approach Western culture. While pursuing these goals China should further explore, study, interpret

and spread the excellent traditional Chinese culture. Adhering to the principle of critical inheritance, it should endow its culture with contemporary significance, make the past serve the present, and bring forth the new through the old in a bid to achieve innovative development and creative transformation. In addition, with a broad vision and an open stance, China should rely primarily on itself, draw experience from others to generate more fruits for socialist cultural construction, and continue to absorb the nutrients of all civilizations to enrich and develop a new socialist culture. Boosting cultural confidence requires enhancing multi-lateral coordination and focusing on cultural construction. The Chinese government should support cultural construction and development by means of institutions, policies, finance, etc. During the practice process, cultural authorities at all levels should attach great importance to cultural innovation, advocate diversified development of modern culture, carry forward the excellent traditional Chinese culture, and eliminate contemporary culture's possibility to become a "rootless tree." They should also give full play to the advantages of relevant social organizations and enterprises. Social organizations feature a "double identity." They are the contractors of government's outsourcing services and therefore can promote the implementation of cultural policies. They are also free entities in the market and can thus facilitate the inheritance and development of a culture. By contrast, enterprises, by bringing cultural resources to the market, can add value and thus boost cultural communications during this process. China should enhance every individual's understanding and recognition of Chinese culture, have it both internalized and showcased by the Chinese people, keep enhancing individual cultural consciousness, create a favorable cultural eco-system, and improve the masses' culture awareness. Also, more efforts should be made in relevant research projects and talent cultivation. China should take the initiative to guide

and encourage the masses to develop a new socialist culture with distinctive Chinese characteristics and style, which truly belongs to the Chinese nation and the public and is popular among all people. This shall

provide new cultural support and the driving force necessary for the realization of the Chinese dream: the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

(Translator: Wu Lingwei; Editor: Jia Fengrong)

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