

On Chinese Civilization Being the Only Continued Civilization in the Viewpoint of the Modern National History Construction

Xu Lianggao*

Abstract: Chinese civilization is the only ancient civilization thriving to this day seems to be a common view in the historical academia and Chinese society as well. Culture is a way that human beings actively adapt to the surroundings and keep consistence with environmental change. All cultures created by human beings are changing, so is the Chinese culture. The physical and cultural evolution presented by the archaeological discoveries and related historical researches show that Chinese culture is multi-sourced and multicultural. This is the secret for the Chinese culture to retain its vitality. The reasons that Chinese civilization is the only civilization thriving to this day among all of ancient civilizations in the world include the ancestral worship, the identity to common ancestors, traditions of writing pedigrees and history books, the long-history Chinese character system and the creative thinking and cultural methods of interpreting new thoughts by using traditional Chinese thinking and cultural structures. Especially in modern times, impacted by the nationalism trend, the national state narration built for meeting the requirement of the national state “historical memory” left us the strong impression of Chinese civilization being the only continued civilization and fostered the affective identification with the common history.

Keywords: Chinese Civilization; theory of unique continuation; nation; construction of history

In modern China, Chinese civilization is the only ancient civilization thriving to this day seems to be a common view of the historical academia and the whole society and we often are proud of it.

As for the emergence of the viewpoint, though Hegel said in early 19th Century

* Xu Lianggao, fellow researcher, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

that modern Chinese culture was not different from that of 2000 years ago (Chen, 2005, p.218), the real Chinese culture continuation view was first advanced by Liang Qichao. He said in *On the General Trend of Academic Thought Changes of China*, “Foreigners said there are five homelands of the world civilization, namely China, India, Parthia, Egypt and Mexico. But those four countries perished, so did their civilizations... Only China succeeds and grows stronger to this day” (Liang, 2001, p.4). Later Liu Yizheng said, “the earliest civilized countries are Babylon, Egypt, India and China. Compared with them, China is the only one thriving to this day” (Liu, 1998, p.4). Liang Shuming said, “The cultures similar to the Chinese culture in history, for example Egypt, Babylon, India, Persia and Greece, have perished, or transferred or lost its independent national life. Only China has maintained its national life with the independently created culture to this day” (Liang, 1987, p.2). Lei Haizong set forth that China’s history features unique continuation and two major cycles by comparing the history of China with the history of the world.^① From these we can see the viewpoint is obviously the product of the contemporary nationalist historiography under the context of globalization, if examining from the historical background of the viewpoint.

Similarly, some foreign scholars also think the Chinese civilization is continued. For example the American scholar Philip Lee Ralph said, “(Chinese civilization) once appeared in the Far East, it has continued—not without changes and interruption, but its main characteristics remained unchanged—to the 20th century... It has existed for a long time for partly geographic and partly historical reasons... They seldom used forces to impose their will to

the conquered nations, but caused assimilation of the conquered nations and turned them into beneficiaries of the advanced ethical system as its bounden duty.”^②

Li Xueqin (2003) summarized, “Numerous domestic and overseas scholars have discussed characteristics of the Chinese culture. Though their opinions varied, they have one in common, that is the Chinese civilization has unique continuation. The other civilizations such as ancient Egypt which emerged at the same time as the Chinese civilization could not last so long and thrive to this day as the Chinese civilization”(pp. 8-9).

Of course some scholars have different opinions though many historians support Chinese civilization is the only continued ancient civilization.

French Prof. Scheid said when lecturing on emperor worship of Rome that he was not agreed with the view that the western civilization is fractured and the Chinese civilization is continued and claimed that European history has continuation. Some experts who study the world history were astonished by the view that Chinese civilization is the only continued civilization of the world in the circle of Chinese history and archaeology. The Chinese civilization is not the only uninterrupted civilization of the world. “Of the many civilizations created by ancient people, some are actually completely discontinued, for example, the ancient Western Asian civilization, Egyptian civilization and American civilization, but quite a few continued in this or that way and still profoundly influence people’s thinking and behaviors. These are what the scholars called axis civilizations, mainly including the Chinese civilization, Indian civilization, Jewish civilization, Greek and Rome civilization. These

① From “Issues Related to History Division and Stages of China’s History” by Lei Haizong, 1936, *Collection of Historical Works of Lei Haizong*, Zhonghua Book Company, 2002. From “Spring and Autumn Period of China and Foreign Countries” by Lei Haizong, 1941, *Soldiers of China*, Zhonghua Book Company, 2012.

② From “Chapter 6 Civilization of Ancient China” by Philip Lee Ralph, Robert E. Lerner, Standish Meacham, Edward M. Burns et al, translated by Zhao Feng et al, 1999, *World Civilization*, The Commercial Press.

civilizations share a common characteristics, that is in the long historical river of several thousand years, they probably absorbed external elements and consequently had profound changes, but their basic spiritual tradition did not perish, or was not replaced by new thought or conceptual system. They are still axis of all activities” (Huang, 2011).

Moreover, China is not the only country claiming its culture having the unique continuation. Darius, curator of the National Museum of Iran, said, Iran believed the cuneiform of Egypt and Babylonian characters of the Mesopotamia were replaced by Arabic, but Farsi survived and continued. Therefore Iranian civilization is exceptional and the only uninterrupted ancient civilization in the Middle East (Pu, 2012).

1. Chinese culture is changing.

It is noteworthy that the so-called “cultural tradition” and “national culture” are concepts emerged in the historical background and social context of contemporary globalization and rise of the nationalism trend. People using these concepts have different purposes and different understandings. Therefore the connotation of the concepts is often blur and is at variance.

What's Chinese culture? It should refer to all cultures created by people in the territory of China in history. What standard should be used to testify that the ancient and modern culture within the territory of China is a continued changing culture, i.e. Chinese culture? If we say all cultures created in the territory of China in history is Chinese culture, does this claim come from our subjective identification, or some objective standards enable us to make such a judge, for example, consistence of the ancient and modern culture, or distinct continuation?

The historical facts are in history the Chinese culture has been innovated and changed because

of exchange, absorption, fusion and adjustment. Each area has its unique culture in different periods. This is determined by the nature of culture and there is no unchanged Chinese culture or Chinese cultural tradition. Tan Qixiang said, “Since May 4th Movement to this day, when discussing the Chinese culture, most seemed to have made a mistake of simplification, and regarded the Chinese culture an everlasting and widely accepted Confucianism-centered culture, neglected the existing differences of time, and regional differences. This is not conducive to deeply understand the Chinese culture.” Moreover, “on the one hand, it is because the Han culture has been changing over the several thousand years and has differences of times; on the other hand, the internal culture of Han nation of the same period varied from place to place and has regional differences. Therefore there is no consistent and common culture of the whole nation in the whole historical period or the whole feudal period” (Tan, 1986).

Culture is a way for human being to actively adapt to the surroundings, adjusts and changes from time to time to adapt to the changing environment, stand up to various challenges, and meet new changing requirements. A culture which can not make timely adjustment to effectively cope with challenges must come to an end and perish. Change is one of the main characteristics of culture. The cultural development involves both inheriting and change and there is no changeless traditional culture. The culture in the history of China is no exception. Just as what C.W. Watson(2005) said, “Any claim on the continuation of cultural form is found unverifiable in the strict historical review because in fact the cultural symbol and form are in constant change, and have made qualitative changes in the past several centuries.” A fact is, “we are adjusting to adapt to the changes of social environment and studying to identify new roles and learning

how to properly play such roles”. “The essence of culture is restructured and upgraded according to requirements of the times”, and “culture is being constantly amended and transformed. Therefore, though culture shows some unchanged essence, it is misleading to tag the label of nation to a culture. What the British (or French, Spanish, Chinese or Indian) culture delivers today is nothing in common with the culture with the same label a century ago no matter how people attempt to distinguish its traits”(pp. 32, 33, 35, 90). What he said is very much to the point.

The change or invariance of the Chinese culture, discontinuation and continuation are often showed as “the same name with changed essence”. Like Sichuan Cuisine which is popular around the world, though all claimed Sichuan Cuisine, adjustment has been made according to the raw materials and taste of the area. A culture that cannot change with changes of the times and environment is not a culture with good adaptability, but a culture loses vitality and will be washed out sooner or later.

The so-called Chinese culture actually has been changing in the historical process. The archaeological discoveries and documentary records show that the culture in history of China has been



Sichuan Cuisine



painted pottery of Yangshao Culture

changing on the physical, technical, institutional or ideological level. Chinese culture in essence has been evolving and developing in constant fusion and the people and area it covered have been enlarged, and the cultural connotation is changing in the process of exchange and fusion.

The physical culture in history discovered with archaeological efforts shows that clothing, food, living, transportation, and burial system, among others, intuitively and evidently show the huge changes of culture, and each period has its unique physical culture. For example, from the painted pottery of Yangshao Culture, grey pottery, black pottery and jade of Longshan Period, bronzeware of Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, ironware after the Warring States Period, ceramics after the Tang and Song dynasties, have experienced fundamental changes. Someone has joked that the Chinese culture of the Tang Dynasty is in Japan and that of the Ming Dynasty is in Korea. This saying at least shows that Japan has kept relative more Tang cultural elements and Korea has kept relative more cultural elements of the Ming Dynasty. We can see there are not two

dynasties having the same or similar culture in the history of China. It is because of the differences and changes, the periodization and dating of the study of implements of archaeology can be carried out and established. But we neglected the cultural changes when talking about the Chinese culture!

From the institutional level, we can see from the Neolithic Age, through Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties, to the Qin, Han, Sui, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, the national political system developed from nothing, and from ancestor worship belief and kinship-based patriarchal clan system to the centralized and autocratic regime with the feudal hereditary system as core imperial power centered centralized monarchy, and to the democratic political thought and practice, culture has been changing.

From the ideological level, though the changes of ideological views mostly happened in the form of “new concepts in an old framework”, i.e. developing new thoughts that the times needed through the interpretation of Confucian Classics^①, changes of ideological thoughts of different times are obvious. In addition to the ideological creation and representation of “Representing myself with Five Classics”, some scholar came up with the opinion that China experienced three important and obvious social transformation and culture restructuring periods in history: vassal states vied for hegemony in the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period and all schools of thought contending for attention to unification of the whole country by

the Qin Dynasty, banning all schools of thoughts except for Confucianism after Han Dynasty; the chronic split of Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism contending and upgrade of new Confucianism of Tang and Song dynasties; lasting impact of western colonial aggression and eastward transmission of western sciences in the late Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty to China (Cui, 2013).

From the aspect of the people migration and the source of ruling group of regime, it varies from dynasty to dynasty. Many ruling groups came from the ethnic groups of the neighboring cultural areas, for example, the regimes of the Southern and Northern dynasties, Yuan and Qing dynasties.

From the perspective of the cultural fusion of different areas, from the Neolithic Age with different cultural circles interacting with each other and jointly forming the cultural traditions to the historical periods after Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, each period has various regional ethnic cultures contacting the Central Plain Culture and repeated the fusion process from “differences between Chinese and barbarians” to the “changes of Chinese and barbarians”. For example Dongyi, Manyue, Rongdi, Donghu in the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, Huns of the Eastern and Western Han dynasties, Xianbei, Huns, Jie, Di, Qiang of the Southern and Northern dynasties, the Turks, Uighur, Tibetan and Nanzhao of the Sui and Tang dynasties, Qidan, Jurchen, Western Xia of the Song Dynasty, Mongolia of the Yuan and Ming dynasties, Manchu

① For example, from the aspect of the evolution of thought and culture, Qian Mu said Confucianism updated its value system according to the new reality in different historical stages so as to make it play the guiding or regulating role continuously. He divided the Confucianism development into six periods: first initiative period in pre-Qin period; second, establishment period in Western and Eastern Han Dynasties; centering on classics, it was embodied in all political systems, social customs, education tenets and personal accomplishment; third, expansion period in Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties. In this period, the school of interpretation was established and expanded to historiography. Since then classics and historical records were equated; fourth, the transfer period in Sui and Tang Dynasties. Confucianism transferred to literature besides classics and historical records; Du Fu's poems and Han Yu's articles carved out a new path for Confucianism; fifth, summarizing and differentiating period in Song, Yuan and Ming Dynasties. Summarizing refers to inheriting and integrating the tradition of classics, historical record and poems; differentiating refers to Neo-Confucianism; sixth, Confucianism in Qing Dynasty followed the two paths of summarizing and differentiating, but the content became different. The differentiating in Qing Dynasty focused on textual research instead of Neo-Confucianism. In late Qing Dynasty, Gongyang School emerged and was a differentiation of the Neo-Confucianism. From “China's Confucianism and Cultural Tradition”, by Qian Mu, *Academic Principles and Criteria of China*, Jiuzhou Press, 2011.

of the Qing Dynasty and so on.

Considering the cultural development process of China, we study the exchanges of cultures in the history of China, and the cultural contact objects, exchange possibility, exchange form, process, focus, result and its effect varied from historical period to historical period. From the cultural development process, we can see the mainstream of the cultural exchange in ancient times of China was among various regional cultures in the early time and then exchanges and fusion of the Central Plain culture with neighboring cultures. With deepening exchanges and fusion, identification and convergence among cultures, the Chinese cultural area has been enlarged, and China contacted, exchanged and integrated with the new neighboring ethnic cultures. In early days, though China had communicated with the extraterritorial cultures recognized in the contemporary times, it was not the mainstream until the late period of history with enlarged Chinese cultural area, and expansion of some cultures. The Chinese culture has extensive contact with these cultures and the cultural exchanges became increasing active. The traditional study of exchange and fusion of various ancient cultures within the contemporary Chinese cultural area and the historical process of the form and development of Chinese culture did not pay due attention to it and only treated it as a whole simply and conceptually. Therefore we can see in a sense the Chinese culture or Huaxia Culture was more a concept and subjective identification, not the history, especially the real conditions of the cultural development history.

In the historical process of multi-culture exchange and integration, the Central Plain experienced the most foreign culture shocks because different ethnic groups came and went and the ruling groups of different dynasties came from different culture areas. In addition to the change of

ruling groups, there were economic and cultural exchanges. For example, Chang'an in the Han and Tang dynasties, the northern barbarians in Luoyang and their cultures. The foreigners were not only assimilated by the Chinese culture, but changed the Chinese culture at the same time and made it to evolve, develop and adapt. Chen Xujing said, "When two or more cultures contacted with each other, none of them could exist solely. Because once occurred, contact immediately becomes a new situation, new requirement and new trend." If all we said above are correct, the remark of retaining the innate culture is illogical on the theory of cultural development or trend. Because before two or more cultures contact with each other, there is no so-called innate culture, and after contacting with each other, they become the only common culture and there is no so-called innate" (Chen, 2005, p.330). But Confucian intellectuals in China's history, through the historical narration restructuring in the official name with Confucianism as the mainstream thought, included these different cultures and ethnic groups into the mainstream culture, and became a part of the Chinese culture and neglected their characteristics and contribution to the Chinese culture. All these reflected changes of substances of the culture in different periods though sharing the same name.

Take the culture of the Qin Dynasty for example: in the Western Zhou Dynasty, the Qin culture was mainly presented as Zhou culture and these two cultures were closely related (Liu, 1996). But since the Spring and Autumn Period, Qin culture changed profoundly following exchanges and integration between Qin culture and the neighboring cultures. A series of unique cultural elements, such as the flexed burial, soil cave tomb, cocoon shaped pot, spade-shaped ge (an ancient cooking tripod with hollow legs), became popular. *The Spring and Autumn Annals* regarded Qin as the rongdi (ethnic groups in northwestern area) and some scholars called it

“rongdi characteristics” (Du, 1998). The differences between the early phase and late phase of the Qin culture and co-existence of a number of cultural elements caused the academic circle to hold different views on the source of Qin people^①: from the archaeological evidences, some claimed Qin culture in the early phase was the Zhou culture, and some believed it was the culture of qiangrong ethnic group in northwestern area. It is not hard to understand the phenomena from the perspective of cultural exchange, integration and evolution. Because of decline of the Zhou culture, Qin people not only controlled a large number of qiangrong people during expansion in northwest, but also absorbed their culture and made their culture to have obvious changes. Qiangrong people gradually identified Qin culture and became “Qin people”. Similarly, the Chu culture development showed similar trend. The cultural exchange and integration is two-way. It was the multi-culture exchange and integration laid the foundation for them to become seven powers in the Warring States Period. It was on this basis, Qin people established a unified empire that was much larger than Zhou and made the cultural identification area of “China” and “Huaxia” much larger. Meanwhile, with exchange and integration of the Central Plain culture and neighboring cultures, the deified ancestors of many neighboring ethnic groups were included in the myth pedigree of the Huang Di (or Yellow Emperor).

Even the Chinese language and characters, one of the important representations of the continuation of Chinese culture, had been changing. Chinese language has continuously absorbed foreign vocabularies and gradually given up many old vocabularies in the process of exchange with other languages and cultures. At present there are many

foreign vocabularies we have used frequently, for example, Internet, daren (talent) and win-win. Even in ancient times, this phenomena repeated in different times, for example *putao* (grape), *hutong*, *yichana* (in a moment), *liugenqingjing* (six roots of sensations are pure and clean), *jiehua xianfo* (presenting Buddha with borrowed flowers), *wushi budeng sanbaodian* (no one comes to the hall of Trinity without a reason), etc. All these are from foreign languages, cultures or religions. Therefore it is worth deliberating whether there is so-called “pure Chinese language”.

Hu Shi (1934) said, “A nation is like an individual, the time learning from the others is the greatest time of the nation; when he refuses to learn from others, his heyday will go and he will embark on a decline and rigidity way. The greatest time of our Chinese nation was the time we were willing to learn from neighbors. From Han to Tang and Song Dynasties, was there any discipline without imitation of foreign countries in architecture, painting, carving, music, religion, thought, arithmetic, astronomy, and technology? It is needless to say Buddhism and the fine arts and architecture it brought along. From the Han Dynasty to this day, not a single calendar reform of China was not made with new method of foreign countries. The calendar of the past 300 years was completely copied from the western countries. When it came to the period we refused to learn from others, our culture did not make progress” (Hu, 1934).

Some renowned scholars also realized that the widely accepted Chinese culture and political area were not the same as the Chinese culture and political area in ancient times. Chinese culture and political area in modern times are products of multi-culture exchange, integration and expansion

① From “On the Source of Qin” by Liu Qingzhu, *The Journal of Humanities—Proceedings on Pre-Qin History*, P177. “My Humble Views on Qin People Ethnicity and Cultural Origins” by Han Wei, *Chinese Cultural Relics*, 1986, Issue 4.

in different historical periods. In the process of exchange and integration, the cultures contacted and exchanged constantly till learning from each other and integrating with each other. Therefore, the look and connotation of Chinese culture had been changing and the ethnic group and political area with common cultural identity were being enlarged.

With this awareness, they realized studying the cultural development and evolution process is of profound significance for understanding the contemporary Chinese culture and looking into the future development. Since modern times, scholars made the understanding of the development process of Chinese culture, i.e., how the Chinese culture has developed today's features and cultural identity step by step, as an important subject. Liang Qichao put forward in his book *Research Methods of China's History*, important subjects of China's science of history, including "how many ethnic groups does the Chinese nation consist of? How is its integration and maturation" (Liang, 1998, p.5)? Su Bingqi (1994) also said, "First, we should restore the original look of the distorted history. That means the Central Plain centered, Chinese nation centered and imperial dynasty centered traditional views must be corrected to restore the original look of the history. Second, the following questions must be answered correctly: the origin of the Chinese culture, formation of Chinese nation, formation and development of the unified multinational country" (p.3).

2. Chinese culture is multi-sourced and multicultural.

If we say in history there was a Chinese culture, it was changing, multi-sourced and multicultural.

The archaeological materials show that in the Neolithic Age, the core area of China had formed the multicultural distribution characteristics. Xia Nai(1977) divided the Neolithic Age Culture of

China into seven areas (pp.217-232); Su Bingqi divided the Neolithic Age Culture into six areas, namely the Middle Reaches of the Yellow River, Lower Reaches of the Yellow River, Middle Reaches of the Yangtze River, Lower Reaches of the Yangtze River, Poyang Lake-Pearl River Delta, and the northern cultural area with the Great Wall as the center; Yan Wenming summarized the Neolithic Age Culture of China into the Central Plain Cultural Area, Shandong Cultural Area, Yangtze River Middle-reach Cultural Area, Jiangsu-Zhejiang Cultural Area, Yanshan-Liaoning Cultural Area and Gansu-Qinghai Cultural Area. From the economic types, it can be divided into the dry land agricultural economic and cultural zone, paddy agricultural economic and cultural zone, and hunting and gathering economic and cultural zone. On this basis he advanced, "the five cultural areas except for the Central Plain were closely adjacent to and centering on the Central Plain cultural area, like a huge flower, and these five cultural areas were petals while the Central Plain Cultural Area was like the flower heart" (Yan,1987). Zhang Guangzhi (1989) advanced the multi-regional culture and interaction circle theory in the Neolithic Age. All these believed in the Neolithic Age there was multicultural phenomena and these cultures were sources of the Chinese culture, i.e. the Chinese culture was multi-sourced.

On the one hand, through multicultural co-existence, contact, exchange and integration in the Neolithic Age, to the period of Erlitou Culture when the Central Plain culture took shape, through exchange and integration with several cultural groups of east and west in the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties, to the initial shaping of Huaxia cultural identity and the concept of difference of Chinese and barbarians in the Zhou Dynasty characterized by rituals and music culture, and through exchange and integration with neighboring cultures such as Manyue in the south, rongdi in the north, barbarians

in the east in the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period, the Chinese culture and cultural identity in a larger area formed, laying a foundation for the founding of the Qin and Han empires.

On the other hand, after entering the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties, though the great cultural tradition identity, represented by the ritual and music cultures, was formed, various areas had kept their own small cultural traditions. The co-existence and interaction of the great cultural traditions and small cultural traditions has long been the characteristics of the Chinese cultural development history. After understanding the Chinese culture of the three Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, we still could not preset a pure so-called “Chinese cultural tradition”. Actually, in the history of Chinese culture development, smaller-area cultural traditions existed in different periods. From the perspective of great and small cultural traditions, the regime change of Xia, Shang and Zhou was the process of different regional cultures strengthening itself in the process of identifying and accepting the great traditions, and complementing, correcting and developing great traditions while obtaining the dominant position. Just as what Zhao Hui summarized the important achievements of archaeology of the three dynasties, “It has been clearly distinguished from the archaeological perspective that Xia, Shang and Zhou had three kinds of interlinked but different archaeological cultures, and each had its own cradle and co-existed for some time. The relations between the three cultures were not “father and son”, but similar to “brothers”. According to Su Bingqi, our education on history has been the “grand unification viewpoint” for a long time, and regarded Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin and Han as regime changes in direct line of succession. Though this viewpoint was questioned frequently, it was the archaeological evidence making it completely obsolete” (Zhao,

2002). The interaction between great and small cultural traditions staged from time to time in the regime changes and interaction and integration of various ethnic groups. Thus the Chinese culture included all the other cultures, kept integrating and innovating and maintained vitality in the process of constant adjustment. We can say there is not a so-called cultural tradition that is continuous and changeless and covering the whole country (Xu, 2014)!

Liu Shiwei, Fu Sinian, Lao Siguang and others also pointed out that pre-Qin states had different regional traditions. Fu Sinian commended that ritual and music cultural traditions were prevailing in Lu State, “Then there is nothing more natural than Confucianism that makes the poem, calligraphy, ritual and music classics as a magic weapon coming from Lu State.” The Yin-Yang School was a product of the cultural traditions of Qi and Yan. Qi people liked to make ridiculous remarks while Yan people were keen on alchemist techniques, “Zouzi came from Qi and won the highest admiration from the state ruler in Yan. He was perhaps a representation of such customs of Yan and Qi, while the cultural tradition of Qi State fostered “Qi Confucianism” with “only Yin and Yang and the five elements, and some incautious sayings and prate”, different from Lu State’s “Confucian’s orthodox”(Fu, 2003, pp.139-144). Liu Shiwei(1998) pointed out that Mohist school regarded Song State as a place of strategic importance because “Song people inherited the tradition of Yin people on managing affairs with ghost, and people got accustomed to foolish practice”, and Song people valued highly of storage, “therefore Mo-tse respected the heaven and clarified the concepts of ghost and neutralized the concepts” and therefore the theory of husbanding and simplifying burial started. He also said, “Western Qin and Three-Jin area were surrounded by mountains, and people there were keen on helping

the weak and restraining the powerful, cunning and fierce and thinking less, therefore legalism started there” (p.135). As for the regional traditions of Taoism, Lao Siguang said, “The representative of southern philosophy was Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu thoughts.” The so-called “the cultural tradition of the south was formed with elements from cultures of Yin people and Zhurong clan and was actually the old culture of the Central Plain.” “Lao Tzu was from Chu, Chuang Tzu was from Song and Song was the successor of Yin.” Moreover, witchcraft in Wuyue in south China also left some mysterious concepts. All these had impacts on the philosophy of the Warring States, Qin and Han Dynasties” (Lao, 1984, p.74).

Tan Qixiang said, “Around the time of May 4th Movement, it was generally believed the Chinese culture was Confucianism, and the three cardinal guides and five constant virtues and Confucian ethical code. I think it could not be that way... All ethnic groups have their own unique beliefs and cultures, and only a small number of upper-class elements accepted Confucianism after migrating in the Central Plain.” “Leaving aside the whole China, or imperial authorities in the Central Plain since the Qin and Han Dynasties, the Han area had not a single culture through different dynasties, nor a single culture widely accepted by all areas”, “China has always been a multinational country, and each ethnic group had its own unique culture before completely integrating into one culture. So strictly when using the term Chinese culture, we should understand it as covering all cultures of different ethnic groups in all historical periods.” Moreover, Tan Qixiang (1986) also emphasized the epochal and regional characteristics of the Chinese culture.

The views on multi-source and multi-culture characteristics of Chinese culture and theories on cultural grand traditions and small traditions explain the complicated relations between uniformity and diversification, continuation and changes,

maintaining inheritance and keeping vitality of the Chinese culture and upper-class elite culture and mass culture.

All in all, we believe in the study of the ancient history and Chinese culture we must clarify the concepts: was the ancient Chinese culture multi-cultural or single-cultural? Was the Huaxia culture equal and interactional with the neighboring cultures or outshining the others? Was the spread of Chinese culture one-way communication and assimilation or two-way exchange and integration? Was the name of Chinese culture consistent with its essence, or was it only a concept and identity and its connotation was changed and expanded in history?

The new materials, new theories and research results of cultural comparison make us think over the traditional historical views and concepts. Only by keeping an open historical view can we more comprehensively understand the ancient society and the human culture development history, and closer to the historical truth while breaking new ground for the study of China’s history and providing historical reference on how modern Chinese culture make cultural exchange, integration, innovation and development in the trend of world culture globalization and national conflict.

3. Analysis of the cause of Chinese civilization being the only continued civilization

Someone might say, for a western scholar growing up in the western cultural background, the greatest interest and confusion on the Chinese culture is nothing more than the following questions: Why the Chinese culture was not interrupted, like other ancient civilizations, in the historical development process? In such a large territory, with such a large population and so great regional differences, was Chinese culture really consistent?

How did they maintain the cultural identity, cohesion and centripetal force? Europe has so many countries. But in the similar large area there is only China, only one cultural identity. Why there is such difference? These are not only the focus of western scholars, but also questions China needs to find answers in real social life.

As discussed above, the Chinese culture has similarity and inheritance, and more importantly changes, multi-sources and multi-culture characteristics. But why we have the impression that Chinese culture is the only continued civilization and especially emphasized the Chinese civilization is the only uninterrupted ancient civilization that thrives to this day?

Generally, we analyze that the formation of the concept was closely related to the autism, the theory on superiority of the Central Plain culture, and the traditional “cultural monism”, the orthodox historical view and the “grand unification” historical thinking, and more to the construction of the contemporary national state historical memory. It is an “impression” brought along by the building of the national state historical narration and image.

First, influence of the ancestor worship thought and common ancestor identity, and the resulting ancient respecting concept.

Influenced by the ancestor worship and ancient respecting concept, the ties of blood between people today and ancient times were especially emphasized. With the blood succession, it is culturally inherited orderly. In the building of the ties of blood narration, people from different regions and different cultures were included in the big family of Huaxia with Emperors Yan and Huang as ancestors, and the common ancestors and common cultural traditions are unanimously approved. So the integration of ancient and modern culture and continuation has become a part of the historical memory.

Second, the tradition of compiling history and

pedigree enhances the sense of ancient and modern culture coming from the same strain.

The cultural tradition influences our thought and concepts which in turn re-defining the connotation and extension of traditional culture, and the two acted upon each other.

The long tradition of history compilation guided by the orthodox historical view and “grand unification concept” has made the unification and continuation of the Chinese culture popular. Achievements in archaeology changed the monopoly statement of the literature historiography controlled by the upper class culture and enabled us to see the other side of the cultural development history of China, probably the more real side. That is, the continuation and unification of culture was just only a superficial phenomenon the upper class culture. In China’s history, the multi-sources, regional culture diversification and changes of cultural development were essential characteristics. For example, though the Western Han Dynasty and Eastern Han Dynasty had the same surname for the rulers and were treated as from the same strain, the two dynasties could be even regarded as two different cultural systems if without documentary record when only examining from the culture represented by physical cultural relics such as utensils, burial and architectural style from the archaeological discoveries.

Third, influence of the long and unique Chinese language.

The same standard Chinese language writing system is a great tradition with distinctive characteristics. For several thousand years, the phenomena of Chinese character in a direct line of succession leaves us the impression of continuation and consistence. Though the vocabulary and structure of Chinese characters are changing under the influence of other cultures, “in the past the use of Chinese characters enabled the scattered people in Asia to maintain a certain degree of unification”



drawing-like pictograph

(Ervin, 2001, p.200). Xu Jinxiong, expert in paleography, said, “Over several thousand years, Chinese characters have evolved from the drawing-like pictograph to very abstract structure, but with some training one can read literature thousand years ago. Similarly, different areas have different dialects, but they could write and read common characters. The unique language characteristics contributed much for China to unify complicated ethnic groups in such a vast and often isolated territory” (Xu, 1995, p.1).

Fourth, influence of the thought and cultural

innovation mode of “new concepts in an old framework”.

The domination position of Confucianism under support of the autocratic imperial power, and the interpretation of Confucian classics with the thought innovation method of “new concepts in an old framework” make the Chinese culture, especially the dominant thought and concept to give an impression of continuation.

In the traditional autocratic society of China, the new thoughts often appeared in the name of old ones to prevent criticism of “unorthodox”. But in modern times, the old concepts were labeled unconventional in fear of receiving the comment of “lack of innovation”. Under the social background of autocratic society and Confucianism domination, the cultural innovation was normally made in the way of “new concepts in an old framework”, i.e., giving new meanings and structuring new texts to the classics through re-selecting, interpreting, explaining and evaluating. China’s academic history and history of thought after all schools of thoughts contending for attention were regarded by someone as a history of wasting wisdom on classics interpretation. But one of the development modes of the Chinese culture were to integrate new and epochal thoughts and concepts through re-selecting, interpreting, explaining and evaluating classics to meet requirement of different times. The modern and ancient classics traditions are two opposite and complementary means and methods. This is how the impression of so-called Chinese culture continuation was created.

After the Han Dynasty, the dynasties respected Confucianism as the official guiding thought and showed recognition to the great traditional culture. In history, rulers of all dynasties basically approved and accepted the great tradition, and posed as successor and advocator of the culture and consequently acquired the “orthodox” position in culture.

Fifth, influence of the modern general history narration construction.

Influenced by the trend of thought in modern nationalism, the national general history narration for meeting the requirement of historical memory of national state gave us the impression of the Chinese culture being the only continued civilization. Because the construction of nationalism concept and modern national state history narration was to enhance the national cohesion, foster national identity with common ancestors and history, and testify legitimacy and validity and the long history of modern national state and especially emphasize integration and inheritance of nation and culture in ancient and modern times. Just as Fairbank (1999) said, "Historians and sociologists describe two images of China for us, and one emphasizes the continuation of modern China with a long history, and the other emphasizes new characteristics of revolutionary reform and innovation. We need to combine these two images. Continuation and interruption connected with each other as the longitude and latitude of history after all" (p.330). Some scholar pointed out, "The formation of the multinational unified country of China was the result of political and military efforts of governments in history on the one hand; and on the other hand, it was an elaborate work of historians on pedigree of national culture and history" (Qian & Wang, 2004, p. 169).

The so-called "national cultural tradition" was nothing more than a historical concept created under the historical background of nationalism prevailing by means of interpreting and envisioning historical elements with the historical memory reconstruction means such as recalling and forgetting, and highlighting and distorting. It is often regarded as the community of imagining—an important characteristics of nation, to enhance the national self-awareness, self-identity and differences between

"my" and "the other's" nations.

The formation of Chinese culture being the only continued culture, the early theory on "China" and theory on source of Chinese nation and the construction from the earliest China to the modern China development history and Chinese nation evolution history were influenced by contemporary nationalism. The historical interpretation and narration of the times became incontrovertible mainstream historical discourse system of modern China because of being widely publicized and accepted for the actual political need of meeting the psychological needs of Chinese people on seeking roots and collective identity, and fostering and constructing the national state awareness and enhancing cohesion of the Chinese nation. Although Chinese history narration system with Marxist historical view as the guidance had also occupied the dominate position with official support during that time.

In a word, the continuation of Chinese character, ancestor worship and blood relationship legend system, the tradition of respecting ancestors, the cultural innovation mode of "new concepts in an old framework", orthodox, great unification historical narration tradition and modern national state history narration, among others, created and enhanced the impression that Chinese culture is the only continued culture. Therefore we can say essentially this concept was "my" national history narration created by the Chinese historians with strong historical self-identity based on the epochal need of nationalism thought and national state for shaping the common historical memory of citizens of the national state and a product of its publicity and education on people's thought. It is a kind of impression brought along by the history narration, and has formed a kind of understanding for us on the history of China. It is also a representation of the value and social role of historiography.



Liang Qichao

The formation and wide spread of the theory on Chinese culture's continuation, antiquity of national state "China" and other concepts were the product of joint effect of such elements and became a part of our knowledge through education. Liang Qichao said in *New Historiography*, "The purpose of the reform in the history circle was to combine historical materials and their interpretation to provide guidance for actions and evoke patriotism consciousness." "Without reform of historiography, it cannot enhance the national consciousness of Chinese citizens and keep China's existence and continuation" (Schneider, 2008, pp.66-67). The purpose was to foster Chinese people's national consciousness and a sense of national pride, enhance national identity and cohesion, as what Liang Qichao, Qian Mu and Li Ji and others advocated.

(Translator: CCTB Translation Service;
Editor: Yan Yuting)

This paper has been translated and reprinted with the permission of *The Central Plains Culture Research*, No.2, 2017.

REFERENCES

- Axel Schneider. (2008). *Truth and history—Historical thought and ethnic identity of Fu Sinian and Chen Yinke*. In Guan Shan and Li Maohua(Trans). Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press.
- C.W. Watson. (2005). *Multiculturalism*. In Ye Xingyi (Trans), Changchun: Jilin People's Publishing House.
- Chen Xujing. (2005). *Overview of culturology*. Beijing: China Renmin University Press.
- Cui Cunming. (2013-08-06). Social transformation and culture reconstruction. *Guangming Daily*, (11).
- Du Zhengsheng.(1998). Investigation on "Rongdi Characteristics" of Zhou and Qin ethnic culture-Also on unearthed "Northern Patterned" Bronze ware in central Shaanxi area. *Studies on Zhou and Qin culture*. Xi'an: Shaanxi People's Publishing House,
- Ervin Laszlo. (2001). *The multicultural planet:The report of a UNESCO international expert group*. In Dai Kan and Xin Wei (Trans). Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press.
- Fu Sinian. (2003). Introduction to philosophers of the Warring States—On regional characteristics of philosophers of the Warring States. Feng Tianyu. *Chinese Academic Evolution, Book I*. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press.

- Hu Shi. (1934). Confidence and self-examination. *Independent review*, (103).
- Huang Yang. (2011, August 16). Civilization and civilization continuity. *Chinese Social Science Today*.
- John King Fairbank. (1999). *The United States and China (4th edition)*. In Zhang Lijing(Trans), Proofread by Ma Qinghuai. Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Lao Siguang. (1984). *New history of Chinese philosophy (I)*. Enlarged Edition. Taipei: San Min Books co., Ltd.
- Li Xueqin, Qin Tong. (2003). Exploring origin of Chinese civilization, *Civilizations*, (5).
- Liang Qichao. (1998). *Research methods of China's history*. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Press.
- Liang Qichao. (2001). *On the general trend of academic thought changes of China*. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Press.
- Liang Shuming. (1987). *Essence of Chinese culture*. Beijing: Xuelin Publishing House.
- Liu Shipei. (1998). *Academic works of Liu Shipei*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Publishing House.
- Liu Shishan,(1996). Exploring on the origins of Qin cultural and Qin People. *Archaeology*, (3).
- Liu Yizheng. (1988). *History of Chinese culture*. Shanghai: Orient Publishing Center,.
- Pu Shi. (2012). Iran-Like path selection: Modernity and its rebellion. *Sanlian Life Week*, (19).
- Qian Maowei & Wang Dong. (2004). *Brilliant works on ethnic spirits—Historiography and traditional culture*. Beijing: Beijing Library Press.
- Su Bingqi, Yi Weizhang. (1981). Issues concerning archaeological culture classification and types. *Chinese Cultural Relics*, (5).
- Su Bingqi. (1994). *Ethnic Chinese, descendant of dragon, Chinese people-Roots seeking with archaeology*. Shenyang: Liaoning University Publishing House.
- Tan Qixiang. (1986). Epochal differences and regional differences of Chinese culture. *Journal of Fudan University (Social Sciences)*, (2).
- Xia Nai. (1977). Carbon 14 dating and Pre-History archaeology of China. *Archaeology*, (4).
- Xu Jinxiong. (1995). *Chinese ancient society—Perspective of characters and anthropology*. Taipei: The Commercial Press in Taiwan.
- Xu Lianggao. (2014). Cultural great traditions and small traditions in the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties of China—A case study of the early religious belief of Yangtze River Drainage Basin reflected by the immortal statues and similar cultural relics. *Archaeology*, (9).
- Yan Wenming. (1987). Unification and diversification of Pre-history Culture of China. *Chinese Cultural Relics*, (3).
- Zhang Guangzhi. (1989). China's Sphere of Interaction and Formation of Civilization. In *Celebration of Su Bingqi's 50th Anniversary of engaging in archaeology*. Beijing: Cultural Relics Press.
- Zhao Hui. (2002). Archaeology and reconstruction of Chinese history—In memory of the 50th Anniversary of establishment of the archaeology department of Peking University. *Chinese cultural relics*, (7).