

A Historical Survey on Modernization of Chinese Culture

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Received: January 31, 2013 Accepted: March 1, 2013 Online Published: March 28, 2013

doi:10.5539/ass.v9n4p129

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v9n4p129>

Abstract

Modernization of culture is one of the most complicated, profound and obscure issues in human social and historical development and changes. It occupies a core position in the overall layout of Chinese social modernization construction and it prescribes the basic target and development direction of Chinese modernization construction. That is to say, it is an issue about how to realize development of human being and modernization of human being. Thus, it is necessary for us to re-survey the issue of modernization of Chinese culture and reveal the internal mechanism and development rule of modernization of Chinese culture.

Keywords: modernization of culture, historical materialism, internal essence, methodology

Modernization of Chinese culture refers to the historical progress of Chinese national culture stepping towards modernization and it has the national traits and epochal characters. In the meantime, Chinese modernization contains modernization of culture, modernization of economy, modernization of politics, modernization of society and modernization of human being, etc., which mutually distinguish, correlate, promote and develop. The fundamental target of Chinese socialist modernization is to realize modernization of human being, while modernization of human being is manifested as modernization of culture. Hence, modernization of Chinese culture constitutes the basic domain of Chinese socialist modernization. It has strong ideological functions and internally prescribes the basic target and development direction of Chinese modernization. Identification of the issue of modernization of Chinese culture has to “resort to the Chinese society and history itself” and keep a foothold in the narrow level of culture for a scientific explanation to reveal the internal mechanism and development rule of modernization of Chinese culture.

1. The Historical Progress of Modernization of Chinese Culture

Modernization of Chinese culture has, all along, run through Chinese social and historical development. Ever since the Opium War broke through, as a historical topic of social national trait and epochal character in the old China, “emancipation of Chinese people” has been naturally thrown to the Chinese social and historical platform. Thus, the intellectuals in early China threw their eyes onto western developed capitalist countries and learned from and absorbed political culture, economic culture, scientific culture and military culture in western developed countries so as to pull open the historical prelude of modernization of Chinese culture. Nonetheless, as they blindly and indiscriminately imitated the ideological culture of western developed countries and failed to make a critical survey on their culture, this resulted in serious doctrinairism and mechanism and the mistake of historical idealism was made.

The Chinese intellectuals again stirred up a blockbuster of “New Culture Movement”, which was also termed as “Cultural Enlightenment” Movement. In light of the western cultural belief crisis triggered by western capitalist countries, the cultural beliefs about people’s freedom, equality and universal love they advocated also run up against doubt. In such a backdrop, the Chinese scholar Chen Duxiu proposed “Movement of a large majority of nationals” (Chen Duxiu, 1979, p.16). This, as a matter of fact, indicated that Chinese intellectuals made profound reflections and criticism in the process of exploring a road and mode of “emancipation for Chinese people”. That is, China should neither follow the western capitalist cultural road nor choose the Chinese traditionalism cultural road. Instead, China had to adhere to pondering over the issue of modernization of culture by taking into consideration of the Chinese specific realistic situation so as to search for a scientific road and mode of “emancipation for Chinese people”. Thus, with dissemination of Marxism idea, Chinese people began to employ Marxism ideas to guide Chinese cultural construction to expedite the historical progress of modernization of

Chinese culture. Whether in the process of practical activities of Chinese social revolution or in the process of Chinese national economic construction and even in the process of Chinese socialist modernization construction, Chinese people, all along, persisted in creating socialist culture with Chinese national features by starting out from the specific Chinese realistic situation.

2. Internal Essence of Modernization of Chinese Culture

Modernization of Chinese culture made a start from modernization in China and it per se contains a complicated contradictory process. In other words, Chinese modernization is a self-development process of modernization in China and is also a natural development process of modernization of Chinese culture.

Culture is a cultural movement and cultural phenomenon in the historical development process of human society. So far as modernization of Chinese culture itself is concerned, it is a cultural phenomenon that is generated in a particular Chinese social and historical background and is a cultural pattern that is formed by Chinese people in specific and particular practical cultural activities. Therefore, our understanding in modernization of Chinese culture should neither be only based on culture itself nor merely based on the so-called general development process of modernization of culture. Instead, we have to take into consideration of the particular Chinese social and historical background and historical conditions. That is, we should put the scientific explanation of the issue of modernization of Chinese culture into particular Chinese social and historical practical activities with certain principles and height and regard all stages in development particular Chinese society and history as the “source of birth” and “stage” to see through the issue of modernization of Chinese culture. To put it bluntly, a theoretical explanation of the issue of modernization of Chinese culture has to resort to the “historical materialism” built by Marx so as to analyze the internal mechanism and development rule of modernization of culture in a scientific way and also decode scientifically the gene and code of modernization of Chinese culture.

From the perspective of history, the internal development progress of Chinese culture modernization “has neither cut off the history nor lost its direction and neither lagged behind the times nor surpassed the particular phase” (Zhou Sansheng, 2005, p.11). Before the Opium War broke out, the mainstream Chinese ideology was the traditional Chinese ideological culture, namely, such feudal ideological culture as “the doctrine of Confucius and Mencius” and “Cheng and Zhu's Neo-Confucianism”. Chinese traditional culture grew out of the foundation of Chinese natural agricultural economy and presented a kind of “unrestrained” development process. In the meantime, as a sort of Chinese national cultural ideology, the traditional Chinese ideological culture has solidly safeguarded the feudal property in China for thousands of years with its powerful ideological function. Just as the important writer Lu Xun said, “The politics in China for the past two thousand years has mainly been politics of Qin Dynasty” and “The learning in China for the past two thousand years has mainly been learning of Xun Zi” (Lu Xun, 1981, p.164). After the Opium War broke out, the Qing Government began a top-down “Survival and Downfall Movement”, which was mainly initiated by the upper-class intellectuals in Qing Government, including enlightened literati and officialdom, landed aristocracy and landlord class. They learnt from the modern culture, ideological culture, political culture, military culture and scientific culture in developed western capitalist countries and intensively launched the national salvation movement in China. To put it bluntly, ever since the Opium War began, modernization of Chinese culture opened a transfer from “unrestrain” to “act-by-oneself” and a development process of transition from “traditional” culture to “modern” culture.

As the particular Chinese practical cultural activities were continuously launched, it gradually came into the mind of Chinese people that neither developed western capitalist culture nor the traditional Chinese national culture could fundamentally resolve the issue of overall emancipation of Chinese people. Instead, both of them had, on a large scale, aggravated formation of Chinese semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Thus, Chinese people came to be aware that they had to make a premised criticism on western capitalist culture and the traditional Chinese culture and make revolutionary innovations and development instead of either blindly and mechanically copying the cultural road of developed western capitalist countries or following the traditional Chinese cultural road. When Marxism philosophy was brought to China in succession, Chinese people began to employ advanced Marxism ideological culture to resolve the issue of modernization of Chinese culture. From then on, the three cultures of traditional Chinese culture, western ideological culture and Marxism culture converged, which marked the historical formation of modernization of Chinese culture and a kind of life stream with cultural innovation was formed and fed into the long historical river of modernization of Chinese culture.

From the perspective of materialism, the modernization of Chinese culture is an overt symbol accompanying Chinese modernization. Obviously, we have to analyze the internal logics for generation of modernization of Chinese culture in the historical development process of exploring Chinese modernization, which is so-called “Why the channel has so clear water? It comes from the running water in the fountainhead”. Only “material”

does not mean only “cultural” material, but goes deep into the social and historical origin for generation of culture and seeks for the internal mechanism for generation of modernization of culture so as to master the internal development rule of modernization of Chinese culture.

The historical beginning of Chinese modernization is an inexorable outcome of economic globalization. In order to expand global commercial trade, western colonial power launched “the Opium War” in China and gradually established China as their colony. In one word, capitalist countries constructed a capitalist economic mode in China, which greatly deconstructed the feudal Chinese natural economy. Just as Marx said in “The Communist Manifesto”, “The need to continuously enlarge an outlet for their products drives the bourgeoisie to run all over the world. It has to settle down and develop everywhere and establish a connection all over. (Marx, 1995, p. 276)” Meanwhile, with the logical pattern of capitalist economic globalization, capitalist culture was also accordingly disseminated to every corner in all nations in the world, taking root, sprouting and fruiting.” As a result, Chinese people blindly and mechanically copied the ideological culture in developed western capitalist countries and stirred up “Westernization Movement”, “Hundred Days' Reform” and “Xinhai Revolution” etc., which finally ended up with failure. The reason was that capitalist economic culture was established on the basis of capitalist social and commercial economy, whereas the traditional Chinese culture was established on the basis of feudal land natural economy and western capitalist ideological culture emphasized “individual”, whereas the traditional Chinese culture emphasized “collectivity”. It is obvious that quite large discrepancy exists between these two kinds of culture. Thus, the development path of modernization of Chinese culture should neither simulate the western culture that pursues individualism nor follow the collective Chinese traditional culture, which is exactly the core issue of modernization of Chinese culture. To put it bluntly, the issue of modernization of Chinese culture is an issue of comprehensive development of human freedom.

In order to survey the issue of modernization of Chinese culture in a correct way, we have to go in quest of a historical commanding height with certain principle and height. Modernization of Chinese culture belongs to a level of social ideology and has powerful ideological functions. The most important issue in the process of modernization of Chinese culture is the issue of comprehensive development of human being. Therefore, we have to stick to the perspective of historical materialism and make a profound criticism on the issue of modernization of Chinese culture. And instead of simply resorting to criticism of modernization of culture, we need to switch to criticism on the realistic economic life for generation of modernization of Chinese culture. “In the past, we turned round and round at the cultural level in terms of the cultural tendency and failed to touch the economic level. As a result, we finally generalized the issue of way out of China as a cultural issue. (Luo Rongqu, 1993, p. 277)” Hence, it is the key for us to comprehend the issue of modernization of Chinese culture by means of starting out from the practical process in the material life of Chinese social reality.

3. Enlightenment of Methodology in Modernization of Chinese Culture

3.1 The Elementary Issue of Modernization of Chinese Culture Is One about Comprehensive Development of Human Being

Just as Marx said, “So long as a theory is thorough, it is persuasive. The so-called thorough is to be able to grasp the essence of a thing. (Marx, 1995, p. 9)” Obviously, the essence of culture is human being and the issue of modernization of Chinese culture is the issue of modernization of human being. To put it bluntly, modernization of culture is modernization of human being and grasp of the issue of modernization of Chinese culture has a direct impact on realization of the comprehensive development target of Chinese socialist people. Thus, in our comprehension and grasp of the issue of modernization of Chinese culture, we have to adhere to the perspective of Marx’s historical materialism so as to reveal the internal mechanism and development rule of modernization of Chinese culture and comprehend “human oriented” scientific idea in construction of Chinese socialist modernization of culture. In general, the theoretical starting point and end point of modernization of Chinese culture is to improve the cultural quality, ideological level and scientific skills of human being and realize the free and comprehensive development of capacity of human being. In the meantime, modernization of Chinese culture is an organic component of Chinese socialist modernization construction. And in order to promote scientific development of modernization of Chinese culture, we have to return to the historical progress of Chinese socialist modernization, keep a foothold in the process of Chinese socialist practical activities, namely, Chinese socialist practical economic activities and political activities, and facilitate reform of Chinese economic system and improvement of the political system, which not only plays the ideological function of modernization of Chinese culture, but also promotes the historical development of modernization of Chinese culture.

3.2 *The Only Road for Modernization of Chinese Culture Is to Absorb Cultural Quintessence in All Nations in the World and Make Critical Modification to Create Chinese Modernized Culture Characterized by More National Features*

The key issue is how to deal with the relationship between Chinese culture and global culture. Compared with the Chinese national culture, the national culture in all other countries all belongs to the global culture and accompanying the historical progress of the globalization of the world economy, the culture of all nations in the world will necessarily go towards the unified global culture. Just as Marx said in "The Communist Manifesto", "The intellectual products in all nations become public properties. The national one-sidedness and boundedness, more and more, turns to be out of question, so a lot kinds of national and local literatures become a literature of the world" (Marx, 1995, p. 276). In the eyes of Marx, "Literature makes a general reference to science, arts, philosophy, politics and so on. In general, modernization of culture is a double-edged sword and modernization of culture has become a sort of historical trend. In this regard, we have to grasp the historical opportunity of cultural globalization, take a positive initiative in absorbing quintessence of culture from all nations in the world, make a criticism on the culture with certain principle and height, stick to the principle of "absorbing the quintessence and discarding the dross", absorb the rational parts of the culture and get rid of its irrational parts.

3.3 *The Key to Modernization of Chinese Culture Is the Innovation of the Traditional Chinese National Culture*

The traditional Chinese historical culture has been in existence for over two thousand years, and it, indeed, is extensive and profound and of long standing. It implies countless ideological rare treasures and intellectual wealth and is the crystallization of collective wisdom of the Chinese people and is more a part of human global cultural heritage. Therefore, we have to stick to the perspective of Marx's historical materialism and look upon the traditional Chinese cultural ideology in a dialectical way. We should not only notice rationality of the traditional Chinese culture, but also notice irrationality of the traditional Chinese culture. We should not only see care of the traditional Chinese culture for the life of people in the modern society, but should also see its misleading to the life of the people in the modern society. Given the above consideration, we need to keep a foothold in construction of socialism with Chinese characters, continue to carry forward and develop the traditional Chinese national culture, combine quintessence of the national culture of other developed countries in the world and make great efforts to create Chinese culture with Chinese national flavor. In the meantime, we have to follow the historical tide of cultural globalization and take a positive initiative in pushing the Chinese national culture to the whole world and having communication and dialogue with other nations in the world. It is gratifying that, China has displayed its centuries-old Confucian culture to the whole world in the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, namely, "the culture of harmony", and sufficiently embodied the unique charm of the traditional Chinese culture in the modern social life. This also lays a certain cultural communication platform for Chinese culture to go towards the historical culture of the world.

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