



## Culture Justice of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Diverse Civilization

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### Abstract

The main theme of this paper is culture justice, which is the new paradigm of culture development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized primarily by globalization and by the rapid development of science and technology. Confronted by the opportunities and challenges offered by these changes, different countries and people with different cultural traditions will make important judgments and decisions in light of their own experiences and in their specific cultural contexts. As to the impacts of globalization on culture, basically, there are two different views, one being positive, the other negative. So far, most researchers in this area worry that through the cultural exchange the western culture can easily supplant the local culture, causing reduction in diversity through hybridization or even assimilation. Under such circumstance, it is of extreme necessity to have a study on the trend of cultural development and to help the people of different cultures to establish correct attitudes to the challenges. But up to now, there is little research discussing the basis of cultural development and no focus is put on constructing the principle of culture development. Aiming to construct the principle of culture development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to provide a positive attitude to face the globalization, this paper made a research on cultural exchange between china and foreign countries and studied the achievements, characteristics and problems in the Sino-foreign cultural exchanges. The conclusion is drawn that diverse civilization is the basis for national equality and human right, the world needs all kinds of cultures and that we should inherit and develop our cultural tradition and use the achievements of diverse culture, to make progress through innovation with each passing times.

**Keywords:** Culture justice, Diverse civilization, Globalization, Cultural exchange

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Research background

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the further development of industrialization and scientific revolutions, the diffusion of scientific knowledge and technology worldwide has been promoted, geographical and conceptual distances between people have been narrowed and the means of human exchanges and cooperation have been expanded. All these processes have resulted in the advent of economic globalization, which is an objective phenomenon confronting the human race, as economic links and the interdependence of countries and regions become ever more significant and no single country or region will be able to exist independently of the globalized economy. In any case, this process will inevitably affect the spiritual life of mankind, impact different cultures in new ways, and help reshape them significantly.

As to the impacts of globalization on culture, basically, there are two different views, one being positive, the other negative. So far, most researchers in this area worry that through the cultural exchange the western culture can easily supplant the local culture, causing reduction in diversity through hybridization or even assimilation. Such terms are often employed in discussing culture development as cultural imperialism, cultural homogeneity, cultural hegemony, post-colonialism, Occidentalism, cultural centrism, etc. When exchange arises between two cultures, it is usually the

case that the less advanced one is susceptible to the influence of the advanced one and therefore is easier to accept the latter. It is inevitable that different cultures exchange, assimilate, integrate and supplement with each other. But a nation is unable to take the initiative in the exchange and assimilate what is beneficial to it if it is weak with stagnant culture and backward science and technology. Under such circumstances, it is very likely to be devoid of options in choosing from foreign cultures and become an absolute passive receiver. Post-colonialism study is a new and hot topic in academic field these years, and it is applied to many fields of studies. Take its application in translation studies for example. Scholars find that the power differentials in the world determine the translation currency and material. Despite the ever-increasing number of translations of Chinese works, according to statistics, the amount of works translated from English into Chinese is much larger than that from Chinese into English and the quality of the latter is rather low, compared with the former. The reason for this mainly lies in that although the globalization of English ensures that translation doesn't only communicate British and American values, but also other cultures all over the world, the strong power dominates translation according to its willing and sometimes neglect and domesticates the culture of the weak powers. It is true of other fields of culture exchange.

### *1.2 Present research*

Since the process of globalization is inevitable, different cultures are bound to influence each other. Cultures with more power are sure to exert more influence in the process of cultural globalization. Therefore, every culture is faced with the dilemma of joining in the outside world and keeping up its own characteristics. Under such circumstance, it is of extreme necessity to have a study on the trend of cultural development and to help the people of different cultures to establish correct attitudes to the challenges. But up to now, there is little research discussing the basis of cultural development and no focus is put on constructing the principle of culture development. Aiming to construct the principle of culture development in the 21st century and to provide a positive attitude to face the globalization, this paper made a research on cultural exchange between china and foreign countries and studied the achievements, characteristics and problems in the Sino-foreign cultural exchanges.

## **2. A research on cultural exchange between China and foreign countries**

Chinese civilization is one of the oldest in the world and has been long known to the world. The course of cultural exchanges between China and the world can be divided into several stages.

In conducting cultural exchange, ancient china had always played the role of benefactor until the middle period of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Before that, there had been also the cases that Chinese culture collide with an equally advanced foreign culture and assimilated what was beneficial to itself. Under the circumstance, it often took quite a long time to move from the clashing stage to the assimilating stage and the mutually benefiting stage in the end. Later, since China no longer took the lead in the area of science and technology, it often had to learn from foreign cultures to make up for its weakness. For example, in the middle period of the Ming Dynasty, China began to adopt western approaches in astronomic studies and calendar calculation. In the 100 years after the Opium War (1840-1842), China had been forced to accept some foreign cultures.

### *2.1 Sino-foreign cultural exchanges after the implementation of the reform and opening policy*

Since 1978, the implementation of the reform and opening policy and the switch from a planned to a market economy have generated profound changes in all areas of Chinese society. In order to be able to make timely adjustments to these changes, the Chinese government has stipulated a series of guidelines and policies concerning the future development of Chinese culture. The deepening of reform and opening to the outside world has made Sino-foreign cultural exchanges more flourishing than ever.

In 1994, some 13,176 persons in 1,176 delegations for cultural exchanges with foreign countries were approved by the Ministry of Culture. Of the delegations, 11 were official cultural delegations, 347 were performing groups, and 281 were parties from cultural circles and other people concerned with cultural exchanges. Meanwhile, 103 artistic and 33 cultural relics exhibitions were sponsored in other countries. At the same time, 15 governmental cultural delegations, 161 artistic performing groups and 131 exchange parties from cultural circles and other people concerned visited China, not including the sponsoring of 94 foreign art exhibitions in China. (Zhang Wenjian:1994)

The year 1996 saw the increased solidarity and strengthening of bilateral relations between China and many other countries. Visits to the peripheral countries by government cultural delegations and cultural officials included ones to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines. China also received government cultural delegations and cultural officials from them, thus promoting understanding and cooperation with those countries. Seven large and medium-sized art troupes were sent to give guest performances in countries including Japan, Pakistan and Brunei, and China in turn hosted art performance troupes, exhibitions and observer groups from abroad. (Sun Weixue:1996)

As China draws closer to the rest of the world, its population becomes increasingly cosmopolitan, as more and more foreigners decide to live and work in China. China has instituted the "green card" system that will give greater freedom

of movement to foreign expatriates whose lives are based in China.

As China's only comprehensive, multi-language monthly, China Today has seen rapid progress in the course of promoting Sino-foreign exchanges. In late 2004 it established a Middle East branch in Egypt and a Latin American branch in Mexico, from where the Arabic and Spanish editions of China Today are edited, printed, published and distributed. This is further testimony to China's cultural interaction with the rest of the world.

In November, 2000, China and the United States concluded an agreement on China's entry into the WTO. This year, China successfully reached an agreement with the European Union. China's openness will increase still further after joining the WTO. However, it should be pointed out that at a time when China has just established its market economy system and when the scope of domestic cultural undertakings as an industry is still in the making, China will face both opportunities and great challenges through its relaxation of the conditions for foreign entry into the Chinese culture sector. However, China will steadfastly keep to its opening policy and try its best to raise the quality of Chinese cultural products in order to compete within the international market.

### *2.2 The achievements and characteristics of Sino-foreign cultural exchanges after the implementation of the reform and opening policy*

At present, China has cultural cooperation agreements with 123 countries, and has signed 430 cultural exchange implementation plans. It has established relationships within the realm of culture with over 160 countries and has ongoing, many faceted contacts with innumerable foreign and international cultural organizations. Chinese foreign cultural exchanges encompass literature, art, cultural relics, museums, the media, publishing, film, sports, education, science and technology, health, tourism and religion. Numerous celebrated foreign works of literature and social science have been translated into Chinese, and world famous foreign artists and their works have been introduced to China by the Chinese Ministry of Culture. Chinese culture is also actively disseminated abroad. Many Chinese artists have participated in international art festivals or contests involving music, dance, and acrobatics. In general, China's major achievements and characteristics in cultural exchanges with other countries can be summed up as follows.

(1) China's cultural co-operation with neighboring countries developed steadily.

According to the general principle of China's diplomatic work and the wish to establish friendly relations with surrounding countries, China made her own outstanding national culture more widely known and got to know the outstanding cultural achievements of other countries in Asia.

(2) China's cultural exchanges with the countries of the Third World were developed.

Asia, Africa and Latin America are where the countries of the Third World are concentrated. Developing and maintaining friendship and co-operation with such countries is the basis of China's foreign policy.

(3) The adoption of flexible ways actively helped the development of cultural exchanges with Europe and North America.

There were a variety of ways and channels of governmental and non-governmental cultural exchanges between China and countries in Europe and North America.

(4) Nongovernmental cultural exchanges developed energetically.

Nongovernmental cultural exchanges were the major channels for cultural exchanges with foreign countries, and made important contributions to increasing friendship between China and countries all over the world.

(5) The introduction of sound and progressive foreign cultural products helped the cultural undertakings of socialist China to prosper.

After the implementation of the reform and opening policy, the Ministry of Culture actively published China's outstanding national culture, at the same time paying attention to the introduction of outstanding cultural achievements from the rest of the world to develop bilateral and multilateral exchanges. As a result, the Chinese people's cultural field of vision was broadened and their artistic sentiments were improved. The people's spiritual and cultural life was enriched. China's socialist cultural undertakings were booming. The vitality of Chinese culture was renewed and opportunities were won for its development in the future. Though tremendous changes have taken place in the country, China is still dominated by the basic spirit of the Chinese national culture. With increasing international influence of China Chinese culture is becoming a powerful force in the world.

### *2.3 Problems in Sino-foreign cultural exchanges*

Misreading and even conflict, between cultures is inevitable because of the differences in national cultures, histories, and societies. When two or more cultures engage in dialogues or exchanges, each interprets the alien cultures according to its own traditions and modes of thought. Misunderstandings thus arise, and other cultures are distorted, leading to the various misreading that have occurred in history. Examples are provided by the misunderstanding of traditional Chinese culture by the French scholars of the Enlightenment, and that of Western culture in modern China. Because of

misreading occurred in culture exchanges, some more problems arise. The first involves rebuilding a wall to fend off openness and dialogue in the name of preserving the so-called purity of traditional culture for fear that it might be misread; the second is the adoption of a hegemonistic and chauvinistic attitude and the acceptance of misinterpretations about the cultures of weaker nations; the third is to use cultural misreading as an excuse for a reluctance to learn from and understand other cultures. Perceiving and dealing with such problems properly has arisen great concern in today's international cultural exchanges. It is obvious that resolving these problems will be of great help for social progress and the development of mankind. In fact, "misreading" could also be understood as "awareness," that is, to be aware of oneself and to better oneself through an awareness of others. The aim of cultural exchanges and dialogue is to provide self reflection, rediscovery of oneself, and references to alien cultures and new sources of thought. It will take a long time to attain a thorough awareness through such "reading," and this topic will no doubt increase in importance in the cultural exchanges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

New questions have arisen in terms of international culture since the 1990s because of great changes in the world situation. Cultural "Euro-centrism" and "Occidentalism" have become the target of public criticism, and the establishment of new international cultural relationships has become the focus for thinkers and scholars from all over the world.

Never before has China been more prominent on the international scene or had such close interaction with the Western world than now. But neither has it experienced such an onslaught of Western culture, particularly its younger generation, who unreservedly adopt the exotic hairstyles, pop music and diverse leisure pursuits that are to them the West's most influential exports.

Might young Chinese people embrace Western culture to the extent that they reject their own? To find out, a group of university students carried out a survey on young people in seven Chinese cities, the results of which are discussed and analyzed in staff reporter Lu Rucai's article, "Embracing Western Ways While Cleaving to Tradition." Its conclusion is that acceptance of Western products and behavioral norms does not equate with an inside-out transformation.

There is still a lot for us to do to extend our cultural exchanges with foreign countries in order to enrich the world's cultural heritage and to increase friendship among people of different nations of the world. Our cultural exchange is contributing our efforts to reach this goal. In the future, we should try to find more ways to introduce Chinese culture to the rest of the world. For example, traditional Chinese medicine is a treasure of China but is not well known in other countries. The task of Sino-foreign cultural exchanges is still heavy, but it still has great potential.

### **3. Findings and discussion**

China's multi-millennial history has imbued its culture with an innate strength that maintained national morale during the century-long struggle against aggressive and coercive Western powers, and helped the nation through two decades of reform and opening up. While welcoming aspects of the West that endorse China's presence in the global market, Chinese people nonetheless cherish their traditional culture. To improve future cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, we should have a correct attitude on the following topics.

#### *3.1 Globalization and cultural diversity*

With the development of globalization, culture exchanges are improved and each country has more chances to learn from foreign countries to speed up its own development. While we view globalization with optimism, we do not mean to overlook the cultural differences and traditions that comprise the international community. Even in the globalized era, national and cultural differences persist. One of the important factors that must be kept in mind is the phenomenon of cultural diversity. This can be compared with the diversity of different species on earth and their perpetual vitality. The world is greatly enriched by such diversity, which has become an integral part of the human spirit. Likewise, cultural diversity encourages vigor and vitality, as it fosters respect for history and appreciation of the diverse varieties of human cultures and civilization. Differing traditions should and do co-exist, complementing each other with their merits and contributing to the entirety of human civilization in their respective ways. According to the Chinese ancestors, "different things come together make new things. No difference, no development". Each nation in the world has its own unique culture, which is what the nation can live on as well as the foundation of world cultural development. This unique culture of each nation can not be replaced by others. We are confident that just as mankind will continuously advance, history will not come to an end. The extent to which cultural traditions and local histories are valued will be an indicator of how well a country or an ethnic group is able to develop successfully in the wake of globalization. On the other hand, neglecting or abandoning traditions will render a country lifeless and put it at a great disadvantage in the international arena. To value, foster and preserve cultural diversity in the face of globalization is in accordance with the logic of historical development. But it is also a rational choice to make in the hope of promoting and securing the best possible future for all of mankind in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### *3.2 Traditional and modern culture, Chinese and western culture*

The main topic of discussion in relation to culture in contemporary China continues to be whether traditional or modern,

Chinese or Western forms of culture are more relevant to China at the present time. It has been said that the difference between Chinese and Western cultures is the same as that between traditional and modern culture in China.

There are numerous other opinions that can be divided into several broad categories: (1) Those supporting the preservation of the best of Chinese tradition and opposing the infusion of Western cultural elements. Their love for and conservative attitude towards ancient Chinese culture is obvious. (2) Those in direct opposition to the above who support the complete transformation of Chinese culture based on a Western model. This is national cultural nihilism and surrender. (3) Between these two extremes there are a number of scholars whose views involve compromises in various forms.

Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there have been intellectuals with strong nationalist sentiments who were better informed about the world and who believed that in promoting a culture with national characteristics it was necessary to combine the merits of both Chinese and Western cultures in order to create a new variety. History has demonstrated that this approach is preferable to the total acceptance or total rejection of Western culture as a model for China. This is so because this approach transcends the issue of Chinese cultural centralism versus Western cultural centralism. It is not only the most relevant to the needs of the times, but is also the most balanced in spirit. It is a pity that as an independent school of thought it has not been sufficiently studied, reviewed or promoted. In the 1980s, for example, when the transformation of Chinese culture was hotly debated, familiar concepts such as wholesale Westernization, the total restructuring of Chinese culture, the revival of Confucianism, Chinese culture for value and Western culture for utilitarian purposes, etc., were all familiar to the general public, but the idea of “receiving critically (from Chinese ancient culture) and combining this with the merits of Western culture to produce a new, higher culture” was unknown as an independent school of thought.

In the 1930s, Professor Zhang Dainian of Beijing University proposed “a creative combination” and opposed both the concept that “oriental culture is supreme” and wholesale Westernization. He asserted that combining the merits of both Chinese and Western cultures could result in a new form of national culture. The term “creative combination” may be defined as follows: Taking from the traditional to serve the purposes of today; borrow from foreign sources for use in China; critically receiving the old elements and combining the merits of other countries to create a new culture. This is a relatively comprehensive answer to the question of choosing between the “ancient or modern, Chinese or Western.”

In its policies towards cultural development, the government of the People’s Republic of China has consistently followed the principle of critically inheriting from the old and combining this with the best of the world’s cultures so as to develop China’s own culture. This is demonstrated, for example, in the 1986 “Resolution on the Development of Spiritual Civilization,” which states that the fundamental guideline for cultural construction is the proper handling of the relationship between the old and the new, and Chinese and foreign cultures. That is, while receiving elements from history, such cultural construction must also embody the spirit of modern times; and while serving China, China must also face the world. Thus, by combining the old with the new, Chinese with foreign, we will inherit mankind’s achievements to serve our own ends, and by such combination and innovation we will create a high-level, thriving socialist culture. This is the conclusion we have arrived at after many years of searching and practice.

Any nation, as long as it is good at absorbing the essence of the material and spiritual civilization of mankind, is able to create and enjoy a high-level of civilization and make contributions to a higher level of the civilization of mankind. The advanced culture of a nation has never been the product of isolation, but has always been the product of extensive exchanges.

But the root and the main current of any culture must be filled with that nation’s features. The aim of introducing foreign culture is to enrich and improve a nation’s own culture. In dealing with the relationships between the national culture and the foreign culture, one should not act blindly. National nihilism should be discarded. We should maintain a correct stand, viewpoint, and method, criticize and discard the dross of traditional culture, and carry forward the essence of traditional culture. We should also criticize and discard what is backward and decadent in foreign cultures and only absorb what is progressive and useful.

We should conduct cultural exchange with foreign countries in a wider, deeper, more active and more effective way. We must actively publicize the fine traditional culture of the Chinese nation and socialist culture, setting up a correct image of a socialist China. Meanwhile, we should absorb all excellent cultural achievements created by mankind and use these as our reference. Through cultural exchange, different cultures can absorb one another and influence one another. Mutual influence is a very complicated phenomenon in the field of culture. Therefore, absorbing foreign culture is a process of taking a bite, chewing, and digesting. We should adopt the principle of discarding the rubbish, absorbing the essence, exporting more and importing the best, and resisting corrosive influences. By doing so, the different features and styles of various cultures will not disappear. On the contrary, different cultures can learn from each other’s strong points to offset their own weaknesses, and they can complement one another. As a matter of fact, following China’s economic development and improvements made in living standards, the vision of the Chinese people has broadened,

and their cultural appreciation has also changed. Their interests have become wider. They are not only concerned about China's traditional and modern socialist culture and art, but also have a desire to know about the trends of world cultural development, including the different artistic styles and schools.

While absorbing excellent achievements from foreign cultures, we should not be content with imitation without new creation. To be content with simple imitation is sterile, and it is impossible for us to scale new heights in art. Simple imitation is not equivalent to the novelty of the new. The novelty of the new is the combination of modern and traditional, of foreign and national characteristics, and of artistry and education.

### *3.3 The trend of culture development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

The International Symposium on "Cultural Dialogues and Cultural Misreading" was held at Beijing National Library on 9 October 1995, from which we can see the trend of culture development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the opening ceremony, Zhu Kaixuan stated in his speech, "I believe that real cultural exchanges can only be made when people live and talk on a friendly and equal footing." Huntington's work, which studies "cultural hegemony" and predicts new international conflicts in the post cold war period, reveals nothing more than the collapse of Occidentalism, once considered to embody universal values for human civilization. Now time and tide have changed and the West has been forced to take other types of cultures seriously and to consider the changing pattern of world culture now that Western civilization has lost its superior position. It is right in this sense that people of different cultures and races have finally come to see that man is at the threshold of a new cultural epoch after centuries of dominance by Western culture. Most of the scholars participating in the symposium wholeheartedly rejected the concept of "Occidentalism" based on culture centrism. Although it will take a long time to eliminate its influence, its theoretical rejection no longer poses a problem for Chinese and overseas scholars. On the contrary, culture diversity or diverse civilization in the development of world culture is today more and more widely accepted. In comparison to cultural centrism, diverse civilization is closer to the historical reality of cultural development and provides a better definition of its current state and future, signifies historical progress.

Culture justice is the new paradigm of culture development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It should be our basic stand to respect fully the cultural aspects of different nationalities and civilizations, and to promote peaceful co-existence, dialogue, communication, tolerance and the common development of diverse cultures.

As the world economy becomes increasingly global, and culture spreads beyond its original borders to the whole world, the basic path of human spiritual development is clear. World culture is bound, in future, to encompass more common denominators. However, this does not necessarily mean that it will become homogenous. We support the concept of a heterogeneous world culture. All peoples of the world have a responsibility to maintain their cultural characteristics, and at the same time awareness of common values, and the need to contribute to the development of human culture as a whole.

## **4. Conclusion**

Through the study, we can see that globalization of culture is inevitable, but the globalization of culture does not mean the homogenization, or rather, the assimilation of culture. Sure is the western culture playing a leading parting the process of the globalization, and sure too never can the western culture bring all the culture on earth to be a monogenetic whole. To value, foster and preserve cultural diversity in the face of globalization is in accordance with the logic of historical development; but it is also a rational choice to make in the hope of promoting and securing the best possible future for all of mankind in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Culture justice is the trend of 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is very important to respect each other. To make up China's advanced culture in the background of globalization we should hold to the open policy in the cultural field to incorporate things of diverse nature; we should hold to inherit our cultural tradition and to develop our national culture; we should hold to use the achievements of diverse culture, to make progress through innovation with each passing times. To promote the international cultural exchanges and world cultural development in the new century, we are confident that as long as we take equal exchanges as the basis of international cultural relations, and multi-culture co-existence as the common desire of world cultural development, we can build a normal and reasonable new order of international culture. Human civilization can be thereafter further developed harmoniously and comprehensively. World cultural development will definitely have a bright future.

Due to limited time, the scope of the study was restricted to the relationships between the traditional culture of China and the global culture. Because little research has been done to discuss the basis of cultural development and no focus has been put on constructing the principle of culture development, and because access to literature on the justice of culture is limited, the paper is not comprehensive enough in many aspects, so more efforts are needed to make further study.

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