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The Effective Spreading of Soft Power in Chinese Culture

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Abstract

The cultural soft power is the core of power which determines the existence of a national legality and rationality. To form the incommensurability and dialogicality between a country’s culture and other civilizations, we must strengthen the ability to spread culture effectively. The core of spreading cultural soft power is to achieve the identity of extrinsic and intrinsic collective culture. At present, the spreading of Chinese culture still remains, to a certain degree, in a state of dislocation. In order to achieve cultural identity, certain power and value identity should be achieved first. This paper aims at exploring the above issue based on the analysis of the current situation of Chinese culture spreading and its soft power.

Key words: Cultural soft power; Cultural transmission; Value identity

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1. CULTURAL TRANSMISSION AND CULTURAL SOFT POWER

Cultural ties to a nation’s moral ideals and values not only constitute the country’s “belief system” and provide the basis of legitimacy for people’s social action; they also confirm the identity of a nation’s intrinsic anthropological basis. Therefore, culture is not only a country’s institutional foundation, a power or strength, but also the core of power which determines the existence of a national legality and rationality.

In his book, *Soft Power: The World’s Political Success*, Joseph Nye proposes that soft power is essentially a “force of the second level” for those who do not have a real threat or reward to get their desired results. As with Adam Smith’s “invisible hand”, which is a way to nurture the ability to influence other’s preferences, its core is cultural soft power—that is, culture and information’s attraction, communication ability, and the powers which flow, “spread” or result from them. Cultural soft power, certainly to some extent, is not necessarily arranged in strict accordance with military and economic strength; culture can flow or “spread” to cross borders.

This makes the spreading of culture the main way of building the country’s image and strength. As suggested in the report on our 17th Party Congress, “In the present era, culture is increasingly becoming an important source of national cohesion and creativity, and an increasingly important factor in the competition in overall national strength.” And it specifically set it as an important cultural development strategy in order to “stimulate the cultural creativity of the whole nation, improve the country’s cultural soft power.”

American scholars generally believe that if a country’s culture is qualified in the value of shared values based on the voluntary recognition in consciousness, then it can be a “resonance” in the world culture and play a part in the performance of power regulation. To form the

incommensurability and dialogicality between a country's culture and other civilizations, we must strengthen the ability to transform cultural homogenization, the effective integration of culture and redevelopment activity; that is to say, we must strengthen the ability to communicate culture effectively.

Currently, with the background of globalization, the pattern of national culture has transformed from the "regional space" into a "world culture." Meanwhile, cultural identity definition and the experience of space and time are bound to be re-structured and mutative. At the same time, the perceived way of life becomes a multiplicity of sounds from a single sound, which makes the cultural global spread effectively the essential way to enhance cultural soft power. We should keep pace with "world standards" while not ignoring its ideology, and we should accept the "multi-context" while keeping national cultural purity. Only in this way can the identity of culture continue to play a role in the performance of soft power.

2. CULTURAL SOFT POWER AND THE DISLOCATION OF COMMUNICATION

On January 17, 2011, an eye-catching national image of China played constantly on outdoor big screens in New York's Times Square in Manhattan. In addition, a promotional national image of China's "People Chapter," which was condensed into thirty seconds, was also broadcast by the U.S. Cable TV News Network (CNN) worldwide on all channels. This was the first official, high-profile launch of a Chinese attitude in a major public relations campaign; it also indicates that China's national image transmission is entering a new period of development – the image of countries and citizens.

Currently, the opinions and principles that Chinese Confucian culture advocated, such as "harmony but not sameness," the "policy of benevolence," "the doctrine of the mean," "human and nature harmonious developing" and other ideas as well as Chinese martial arts, calligraphy, paintings, traditional clothing (mainly "Cheong-sam"), Peking Opera, Traditional Chinese Medicine, etc. - all of these have had a certain attraction and influence throughout the world. Now, however, the mechanism of cultural transmission still remains, to a certain degree, in a state of dislocation.

2.1 Internal Culture and the "Anxiety of Interpretation"

In terms of the image of Chinese culture, this culture itself is facing a its own "anxiety of interpretation" and "image inferiority." This suggests that Chinese culture reflects a culture of defeatism (WANG, 2007, p.1-8). Just look at our artistic culture: children prefer to learn piano, cello and violin rather than the Chinese erhu or pipa. The momentum of learning is far behind Western music.

Judging from the subjects that could be gained as well as the scores for talented students going to various colleges and universities, learning Western musical instruments has obvious advantages, especially considering that few people play folk music for bonus, not to mention the low level as a whole. In fact, a person who plays the erhu may finally become well-known for singing because a given school does not consider the erhu as the ultimate recognition of literary culture; this indicates a typical defeatism of culture. "The logic of cultural defeatism is: China's ideology and culture is doomed to be failed culture, which can not compare to the West. However, the ancient Greek prevails over the pre-Qin while the modern drops behind the Renaissance, post-modernism overtakes the contemporary. As a consequence, China constantly becomes slower and always falls behind the West (WANG, 2007, p.1)."

As for the culture of clothing or adornment, for example, we see Korean styles of dress, the kimono from Japan, and the various dress styles of the Arab countries, India, Pakistan, and so on – all have their own universally recognized national costumes. There are nearly 3,000 years of Chinese culture and history of clothing, but we do not have our national costume that we all recognize. At present, our clothing brand is neither the Tang suit, the Han Chinese clothing, nor the Chinese tunic suit. The few domestic brands with high popularity are always suits and casual wear, which are foreign since they are products of the context of foreign culture. Foreign clothing which appears in the Chinese market generally enjoy a top-grade image, while our own clothing only relies on cheap win to enter the international market. The imbalance in the exchange of clothing culture reflects the lack of originality of the Chinese culture.

Academically, currently most of our academic leaders keep learning and conducting the dissemination of Western ideas. For instance, the so-called "creative" part in the ideological trend of literature and art, which arose in the 1990's, almost completely follows Western modernism and postmodernism in its various forms and practices. China's best critics only repeat and rehearse the words that come from the West. By contrast, there is hardly a single Western graduate student who would consider the thought of a Chinese philosopher of the 20th century as a dissertation topic. Almost no one studies Chinese philosophers and thinkers because it is believed that among Chinese scholars, no single individual is worth studying; it is believed that only a group of people (or an ideological trend) may be worth studying, but even that only reluctantly.

While the soaring rise of the Chinese economy has drawn the world's attention, China is currently active in spreading foreign culture, not Chinese culture; however, China is aware of its low level of national culture in the international arena. Mou Zongsan has commented, "To

know a national civilization, we cannot totally repudiate it, though the subsequent culture has no need of the past. No culture can meet all the wants at one time, because the later culture's demand will have no end. If you attempt to comprehend a culture, you can only understand and groom it from its orientation of developing and form to draw forth a growing in the future or a variety of expands" (HONG, 2001, p.192-193). Convention is precious for a creative nation and its people. The primary role of civilized communication should be the exploration of national culture and innovative communication.

2.2 The Fuzzy Image of External Culture

Chinese culture is searching for a spreading way to go outside in this open communicative platform. Through some multiform cultural exchange activities, China has shown its profound culture and art to the people of the world. China has also taken positive steps in setting up Confucius Institutes in every country. By the end of 2008, there were already more than 260 Confucius Institutes located in 75 different countries. Furthermore, China is also establishing a profession in the field of Chinese language in order to popularize Chinese culture. In the field of the cultural industry, in the past few years China has also actively impacted the world cultural market; Peking Opera, and Kun and Qin have been included in the "Intangible Cultural Heritage" list by the United Nations, and a range of cultural products are competing for many international awards. However, while moving outward into the world, the image of Chinese cultural communication still appears negatively biased against China in some ways.

The Tibet events in 2008 attracted international media attention, but some major sectors of the Western media distorted the truth of the reports, such as on the CNN website in the U.S., the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and *Berlin Morning* in Germany. The *Times* in Britain as well as other media publications used many twisted writings, such as "military repression," "force control," and "Tibetans killed hundreds of people." Such reporting directly influenced the majority of Westerners to understand the events in Tibet in an impartial way. Amos Gelber, a professor of media studies at George Washington University, accepted an interview with reporters from the "News Network Show" on the evening of April 23, 2008. Gelbert said the reason why Americans were willing to believe Western media reports is that most people do not understand China. In most cases, the communications between China and the world tend to remind people of China's past rather than its present. Throughout the world, China conveys Chinese cultural traditions through the establishment of the Confucius Institutes. But if there is too much "old sage teaching," while ignoring China's role in the new cultural situation, the world will continue to regard China as an ancient nation.

What arouses the interest and fondness of the world are some films such as *Stimulus 1995* or *Beautiful Mind*. They reflect spirit and wisdom in their content and therefore help to purify the soul. Chinese cultural products are also actively moving towards the world market, but many works such as *Raise the Red Lantern*, *Earth*, *Blind Shaft*, and *Curse of the Golden Flower* represent not a civilized and modern China but rather the deprivations of the past or the feudal ideology which destroyed human nature, or perhaps the desolate situation of the people under Chinese imperial rule. Also, Chinese culture as presented in the international cultural sphere often relies on passive imitation of Western aesthetics.

In addition, the long-standing Chinese pattern of communicating with only "one voice" has not changed very much in the spreading to external cultures. The information content is single, the information channel is single, and we cannot develop more targeted information dissemination systems according to the international audience's specific information needs; to some extent this also restricts the opportunities and interests of the foreign audiences from being able to learn more about modern China. Meanwhile, the outward-looking mass media in China pays too much attention to propaganda. When faced with major international events, Chinese media often do not report in a timely and impartial manner, which in turn prompts foreigners – especially Westerners – to be wary of Chinese news reports. They tend to believe that the information from Chinese media is biased rather than objective, transparent and critical-minded; thus, to a certain degree this causes foreigners have an inflexible attitude and mind toward China.

Therefore, the cultural soft power of China needs scientific cultural innovation and communication strategies. To break the long-term misunderstanding and neglect of China in the world at large, especially in the Western world, Chinese culture must develop self-discovery, self-expression and self-actualization, and it must strive as far as possible to achieve value identity, cultural sovereignty and national self-confidence.

3. VALUE IDENTITY TO IMPROVE THE SPREADING EFFECT OF CULTURAL SOFT POWER

The purpose of cultural spreading is to realize the symbiotic culture in the global cultural exchange and the "win-win" situation among different cultures, as well as to achieve more group identity through different cultural clashes. The core of culture identity is value identity, which to some extent means to clarify self-identification and to resolve the problem of identification justification. Through the development and spread of self-culture, "me" is turned into "we," and "we" is firmly considered

as the common identity. Through the value system of self-culture, “we” has become identified from “them.” Therefore, the effective culture spread is a way to get cultural soft power, and the value identity strived for in multicultural communication is the ultimate purpose in realizing cultural soft power. This means that no matter what the style, the content, or the system of cultural spread may be, the cultural spread must have a dimension of value identity.

3.1 The Recognition Spread of Cultural Sovereignty Values

“Cultural Sovereignty” refers to the idea that “The modern national country regards the national culture, including habits, religion and values, as the state’s will, and gives its own national culture the supreme authority and independent power. It also refers to the value and religious ideas which have close connections with political power and authority. Cultural sovereignty identity is originated from one’s own national tradition, and it does not exclude outside culture; however, whether outside culture is absorbed depends on the national interests and benefits to the national culture’s development” (BAO, 2007, p.72). Culture is the soul of a nation. A nation can be clearly identified and respected only when it has independence in its own culture, and culture is the basic assumption and baseline when nations are seeking free and equal exchange.

Reflected in cultural spreading, the foundation of culture sovereignty is the cultural identity of one’s own country. When facing the current situation in which the globalized culture spread gives priority to the strong Western culture, Chinese culture should, based on globalization and multiple ideas, develop the deep charm of Chinese culture, improve the national culture’s confidence, and establish the subjective position of Chinese national culture by finding more and better ways to spread. That is, China should proactively develop different cultural resources, dig out from tradition, and improve the beneficial value source and attraction in our own culture. This must be accomplished through international information comprehension; we need to digest Western culture in order to attract attention from all over the world through the application of value theory and the promotion of a culture which can represent human democracy and freedom. In the meantime, we should also enhance such cultural integration and spreading; we should improve the national cultural power by using the best combinations of modern media and language.

China must therefore face the huge gap in international cultural authority. Along with the acceptance of the external culture with an open and positive mentality, the key is that Chinese culture should argue for an authoritative position with a clearly identified and committed cultural power and cultural spreading; we need to prove our

culture’s strength both locally and globally. Also, in the process of the spreading of culture, we should no longer be limited by our own national and local cultural field boundaries. Instead, we should continuously transform multinational cultural resources into a culture which can be shared by all human beings. In this way we can realize our own country’s culture identity.

3.2 The Recognition Spread of Human Rights Values in Culture

Human rights in culture is the human’s characteristic as a cultured person. The equality among people not only includes political and economic equality but also cultural equality. With the enrichment of cultural resources and the value of knowledge in society, people have more rights to achieve and acquire education and the right to learn about more and more information. No matter what differences exist among each people, everyone should enjoy the same respect. Such equality is not the same as the parity myth in the theories of Hobbes, Locke or Rousseau which is separated from the real society; rather, it is based on the reality that each individual is different in identity and status. This is important in order to realize each individual’s cultural respect and each individual’s free development among the nation’s people.

In modern society, competition among countries relies on the people’s value identification as individuals, and this includes satisfaction to all common interests among a people as well as each individual’s personalization. The more the people are satisfied in more aspects, the stronger the country’s soft power. The idea of “For the People” is itself a kind of soft power.

Reflected in the spread of culture, soft power advocates “people-oriented” culture and tries to improve and enhance the value of people’s own subjectivity. As for the earthquake in Wenchuan in 2008, China’s media focused its lenses on the earthquake-stricken areas and the people there. Adhering to the concept of “people-oriented” culture, Chinese media’s timely, transparent and effective reports amazed the Western media, and as a result they have received international praise and have greatly improved China’s international image. “The Chinese media came up to the international standard for the first time.” This is one of the viewpoints stated in a long report by the *Financial Times* about China’s media after the big Wenchuan earthquake. Even those who had a prejudice against China’s media gave them high marks. The Sichuan earthquake changed China’s international image, as the article in the *Financial Times* shows.

The value of “people-oriented” culture means that we should respect the subjective thought and action of individuals as much as possible, and we should do the best of our ability to meet the cultural needs of the different individuals in society. It also means that we should value the relationships of man and man, man and

society, and man and nature as living in harmony; we need to embody and practice a humanistic spirit, respect the mining people's potential, and inspire people to be creative. Meanwhile, we need to strengthen the research on audience habits, psychology and thinking in the international culture of communication. By analyzing some external communication vocabularies in related publications and government reports, some scholars have summed up the national image of China as "a peace-loving country," "victim of foreign aggression," "socialist country," "bastion of revolution," "anti-hegemonic force," "developing country," "major power," "international cooperator," and "autonomous actor." However, these words do not touch the hearts of foreign audiences in an in-depth way. One reason is because of the crudeness in the English translation of these words; foreign audiences have difficulty understanding and accepting "revolutionary fortress," for example. Even if such phrases and words can be understood by some audiences, there is still a problem identifying with such words because of the differences of culture and ideology. Thus, according to the international language standards, we should adapt China's external communications and strive for the right to speak in the international public sphere.

3.3 The Recognition Spread of Civil Rights Values in Culture

The idea of the "people" expresses the concept of the "group," that is, the ordinary public and the collective cultural voice. Advanced culture should not only safeguard national dignity and develop individual subjectivity, but also better reflect the social interests of collective culture. This collective culture reflects the cultural value recognition of most people.

Following Levi-Lv Buer's point, involved groups should follow the "Mutual Permeability Law." All individuals not only hold older social ideas, but they also have new ideas about reality. Such ideas contact each other and infect each other when groups are involved in cultural projects. These ideas permeate and integrate with each other in the interests of the similar value consciousness of the dominant groups. Therefore, the key to obtaining the value identity of cultural groups is to construct an open, rational, healthy and timely cultural platform.

Since the reform and opening-up, with the multi-elements of market entities and the molding of the culture industry, we have paid much attention to the civil rights of Chinese culture. Nowadays, China's media focuses more reports on the livelihood of the people, advocating the "Three Approaches" and the permeability of "Humanity" in the dissemination of information. However, induced by consumerism, some media still focus attention only on the rich, the highly educated, and powerful men in the coding of information. The farmers, workers and the handicapped

are usually looked upon as disadvantaged groups, and thus they are marginalized. This kind of information dissemination does not serve to increase the strength of national culture; rather, it deepens the "knowledge gap" in culture produces value conflict because of the unequal use of cultural resources. Therefore, cultural spreading should be based on the subjective needs of different groups of people in order to cultivate and interact with their differing cultural values.

During cultural communications, our culture disseminators need to engage with the public through the use of differing information demands and the information coding features of different social groups; they must try to establish the core of cultural values in the mainstream ideology and promote a recognition of their collective strength. Cultural disseminators must really change and vary their approaches to publicity and inspiration as they engage with various social groups such as farmers and other people with single knowledge structures. For ordinary intellectuals, value guidance requires rational, equal and interactive exchange platform. For the younger generation, we must bringing out the facts and reasons why they have not obtained individual value identity; we should stand in their position to make sense of the truth as to why they pursue fashionable fast-food culture, for example.

Meanwhile, with regard to external spreading of cultural soft power, we should develop different groups to be actively involved in all aspects of cultural communication. For example, patriotic and powerful people in business and political circles should be encouraged to become more involved in the field of foreign media. Also, outstanding Chinese scholars should be encouraged to influence the views and impressions of foreign audiences, especially younger generations, in terms of how they see China; this may be accomplished through research, social activities, and teaching. Next, we need to encourage more foreigners to participate in Chinese cultural transmission. There was a successful example of external communication held in France in 2003 during the Chinese culture year. It was a large-scale photographic exhibition entitled "China in the Eyes of Foreigners – Walk into the Real China." The important characteristics of the photograph exhibition was that it showed the most realistic view of China from the perspective of foreigners, and it reflected the image and culture of China that foreigners understand through an authentic lens. The exhibition not only helped domestic foreigners to understand China, but also allowed foreign audiences to get to know "the real China." Thus, it achieved and advanced a positive communication effect. This could be considered an effective model for future endeavors and projects in the spreading of China's cultural soft power.

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