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Emergence in the New Era, Qualitative Transformation, and Strategic Reinforcement: A Theoretical Interpretation of Cultural Subjectivity in Contemporary China

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Abstract

At the Symposium on Cultural Inheritance and Development, President Xi Jinping put forward the concept of “cultural subjectivity” as a major theoretical proposition. This initiative reflects a dual imperative: to preserve and promote global cultural diversity, and to respond to the cultural conflicts and homogenizing tendencies brought about by globalization. It also addresses mounting concerns over identity dislocation and the cultural colonialism of the Western world. In the context of the new era, cultural subjectivity acquires renewed meaning. It involves the reconfiguration of the relationship between globalization and local traditions, the innovation and dissemination of culture in the digital age, the construction of identity in multicultural settings, as well as the cultivation of cultural consciousness, critical thinking, and intercultural communication and cooperation. Yet, the emergence of cultural subjectivity also reveals persistent constraints that hinder its consolidation. In light of these challenges, it is imperative to approach the issue from multiple dimensions—bridging tradition and modernity, integrating Eastern and Western perspectives, and aligning theoretical reflection with practical application—in order to strengthen national cultural subjectivity and ensure cultural security.

Keywords: *Cultural subjectivity, Emerging connotations, Strategic reinforcement*

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1. Introduction

At the Symposium on Cultural Inheritance and Development, President Xi Jinping, drawing upon a profound understanding of culture and a precise reading of contemporary global trends, introduced and elaborated on the concept of “cultural subjectivity”—a term of distinctive theoretical significance. Proposed within the context of China’s entry into a new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, this concept carries rich connotations and far-reaching implications. A deeper interpretation of cultural subjectivity not only contributes to a clearer conceptual understanding but also serves the practical advancement of cultural development in China under conditions of multicultural interaction and global exchange. Building upon this foundation, the present study seeks to explore the theoretical dimensions of cultural subjectivity in the new era by addressing three key questions: How does it emerge? What are its core connotations? And how might it

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be strategically reinforced? Through tracing its origins and unpacking its evolving content, this paper aims to propose concrete strategies for its consolidation. The study contends that a deeper theoretical and practical engagement with cultural subjectivity is vital to promoting cultural prosperity and enhancing the cultural soft power of both the state and the nation. Moreover, advancing cultural subjectivity is essential to fostering a more open and inclusive cultural environment—one that is capable of responding to the challenges of globalization while contributing to global peace and sustainable development.

2. The Emergence of Cultural Subjectivity in the Context of the New Era

The articulation of cultural subjectivity in the context of the new era reflects a set of multidimensional strategic considerations. This conceptual proposition is grounded not only in the imperative to preserve and promote global cultural diversity, but also in the need to address the cultural conflicts and homogenization challenges brought about by globalization. Moreover, it responds to the crisis of identity experienced in a rapidly transforming world, while simultaneously serving as a strategic countermeasure to the enduring influence of Western cultural imperialism.

2.1. Considerations for the Preservation and Promotion of Global Cultural Diversity

“The world is rich and colorful; diversity is the charm of human civilization and the source of vitality and momentum for global development” (Xi, 2011). It is precisely the cultural differences among nations that constitute the vibrancy of global culture. As Ren (2015) notes, “Global culture is grounded in multiculturalism, and cultural diversity represents a critical dimension for understanding globalization.” However, in the context of globalization, uneven development among national cultures often results in dominant cultures assimilating or eroding those that are more vulnerable. Against this backdrop, the proposal of cultural subjectivity emerges as a necessary response aimed at safeguarding and advancing the diversity of world cultures.

The proposal of cultural subjectivity contributes to emphasizing and protecting cultural diversity. “There are more than 200 countries and regions, over 2,500 ethnic groups, and multiple religions in the world” (Xi, 2022). Each country occupies a different latitude and longitude on Earth, and the environments they rely on for production and daily life vary accordingly, resulting in distinct ways of living. These different ways of life give rise to different ethnic cultures. Therefore, “culture itself exists in diversified forms, and the cultures of different countries, different ethnic groups, and different historical periods each possess their own connotations and characteristics” (Shen, 2021). Under relatively closed conditions, the cultures that countries form through their own reproductive practices are less likely to be disrupted, allowing national traditions to be maintained with relative stability. However, as the bourgeoisie expanded the world market, “production and consumption in all countries have become global in character” (Central Compilation & Translation Bureau, 2012). With production and consumption now extending beyond national borders, international exchanges have grown more frequent, and cultural interactions have intensified, making the influence of foreign cultures on domestic traditions inevitable. In these cross-cultural exchanges, some countries strongly export their own cultures, which impacts the development of the recipient cultures. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the context of accelerating economic globalization. Confronted with the influence of dominant cultures on weaker ones, how vulnerable cultures maintain their own cultural subjectivity has become an urgent issue. The theoretical proposition of cultural subjectivity is thus of great significance for the protection of weaker cultures.

Emphasizing the issue of cultural subjectivity is essential to fostering mutual understanding and respect among diverse cultures. Acknowledging and appreciating the uniqueness, autonomy, and embedded values of each culture—rather than viewing culture as a singular or monolithic entity—lays the foundation for a more inclusive and harmonious intercultural society. Every culture carries with it a distinct history, tradition, value system, and set of contributions, and this diversity deserves to be both respected and safeguarded. By recognizing and respecting cultural subjectivity, societies can reduce intercultural conflict and misunderstanding, thereby establishing a foundation for peaceful coexistence. A willingness to honor and accept the uniqueness of different cultures cultivates mutual trust and shared understanding, which, in turn, enhances cross-cultural exchange and cooperation. Such an atmosphere of reciprocal respect helps dissolve barriers, eliminate divisions, and promote positive cultural interaction, ultimately contributing to the creation of a more inclusive and pluralistic social environment. Stressing the importance of cultural subjectivity not only aids in the protection and transmission of cultural traditions, but also promotes the flourishing and dynamic development of culture itself. In doing so, it strengthens the structural foundations for societal diversity and harmonious coexistence. Therefore, placing value on cultural subjectivity represents a critical step in building a more inclusive, respectful, and diverse global society.

2.2. Considerations in Responding to Cultural Conflict and Homogenization under Globalization

Globalization has accelerated intercultural exchange, enabling different cultures to absorb and learn from each other's strengths. However, it has also given rise to the risks of cultural conflict and cultural homogenization, which may undermine the ability of nations to preserve and assert their own cultural subjectivity. In this context, the proposition of cultural subjectivity emerges as a strategic response to the challenges posed by globalization—particularly the tensions between intercultural interaction and the need to maintain cultural distinctiveness and autonomy.

In the process of international cultural exchange, the risk of cultural conflict remains an ongoing concern. In cross-border mergers, cultural conflict typically arises from differences between cultures in decision-making styles, potentially escalating to intensified confrontations among executives (Gui, 2011). Such conflicts are often manifested in differing interpretations or perceptions of the same cultural phenomenon across national boundaries. Several factors contribute to the emergence of cultural conflict. First, countries possess distinct cultural traditions. Each nation has its own cultural heritage, deeply rooted in its specific historical and social context. When nations with differing cultural traditions engage in exchange, mutual misunderstandings may easily arise. Second, modes of thinking differ across ethnic groups. Each group has developed its own cognitive lens and interpretive frameworks, leading to divergent perspectives on shared phenomena. As a result, individuals from different cultural backgrounds may interpret the same issue according to their own norms and mental schemas, giving rise to disagreement. Third, value systems vary significantly across countries. Each nation or ethnic group holds core values that have been formed and reinforced over long historical trajectories. When people holding different value systems engage in intercultural dialogue, such differences often surface and may lead to communicative conflict. Beyond cultural traditions, thought patterns, and values, the fundamental cause of many cultural conflicts lies in divergent national interests. These underlying tensions in political and economic interests are frequently projected onto the cultural sphere. In response to these risks, the proposition of cultural subjectivity offers a constructive framework for addressing the multiple sources of cultural conflict. It provides a foundation for fostering cultural understanding, defending cultural autonomy, and managing difference in a way that promotes respectful and sustainable intercultural engagement.

In the process of globalization, the interconnections among nations have grown increasingly close, and cultural exchanges have become more frequent, offering expanded opportunities for mutual learning. "However, we must also recognize that globalization inevitably brings about trends and consequences of cultural homogenization, especially through the widespread dissemination of Western culture imbued with strong political undertones and the goal of 'Westernization,' which has posed serious challenges to nation-states, particularly those in the developing world" (Sun, 2013). In essence, "the proposition of homogenization presents globalization as synchronization—aligned with the demands of a standardized consumer culture—resulting in increasing similarities across regions" (Tomlinson, 2002), thereby weakening the distinctiveness of national cultural identities.

Multiple factors contribute to the trend of cultural homogenization. First, the increasing accessibility of cultural transmission channels plays a significant role. The internet has compressed the time and space required for various forms of international communication, allowing culturally embedded information to spread rapidly among users in different countries. Second, cultural hegemony by developed countries has exacerbated the problem. Western nations, particularly the United States, have leveraged their control over media discourse to widely promote so-called "universal values" and other Western ideologies, causing negative impacts in developing countries. Third, culturally weaker nations often lack the capacity to respond effectively. In the face of Western ideological infiltration, these countries are frequently compelled to adopt externally imposed values.

In this context, the discussion of cultural subjectivity becomes especially significant. It offers a conceptual lens through which nations can better navigate the relationship between domestic traditions and foreign influences, thereby enabling a more balanced and autonomous approach to cultural development in the era of globalization.

2.3. Concerns over the Challenges to Identity Formation

In the context of globalization and cultural pluralism, both individuals and collectives are increasingly confronted with challenges to identity formation. Identity is not static; it is a dynamic and evolving process continually shaped through interaction and negotiation. As globalization deepens, individuals and groups gain expanded opportunities for dialogue and exchange. At the same time, the factors influencing identity become more diverse and the process of construction more complex, thereby intensifying the tension and uncertainty surrounding identity. Against this backdrop, the proposition of cultural subjectivity emerges as a response to these growing concerns. It offers a framework for navigating the shifting terrain of identity in a globalized world, emphasizing the need for cultural self-definition in the midst of external influences and internal pluralities.

Regional migration presents significant challenges to the identity formation of both individuals and collectives. “As people migrate between different regions, trade with distant partners, or engage in exchanges with others from afar, cultural information and ideas also travel” (Ren, 2015), exerting varying degrees of influence on how identity is constructed and perceived. Such movements may involve domestic relocation within a country or cross-border migration to foreign territories. When individuals leave familiar environments and enter new social and cultural contexts, they experience a temporary or prolonged disconnection from their native homeland. This dislocation alters their relationship with their place of origin and often triggers heightened awareness of identity. The intensity of this identity awareness is closely related to the time and distance of separation. Domestic migration generally provokes a lower degree of identity consciousness, while international migration tends to intensify such awareness significantly. Moreover, shorter durations of migration tend to exert less impact on identity formation, whereas prolonged or permanent relocations often lead to deeper identity negotiations and disruptions. Regardless of whether the migration is domestic or international, such transitions inevitably transform the environments in which individuals or groups live. These shifts prompt individuals to navigate between their cultural roots and their new surroundings, frequently requiring a redefinition or reconstruction of identity. During this process, many experience what may be termed “choice anxiety,” which complicates identity maintenance. The proposition of cultural subjectivity, in this regard, serves as a conceptual and practical anchor, enabling individuals and collectives to preserve their cultural independence while navigating the complexities of identity reconstruction.

Transnational dissemination of information plays an increasingly influential role in shaping the identity of individuals and collectives. While physical migration remains the most direct factor affecting identity, the widespread adoption of the internet has significantly altered the mechanisms through which such influence occurs. As digital connectivity continues to expand, region-specific cultural expressions are no longer confined to their localities but are instead disseminated more broadly and accessed by more diverse audiences across national borders.

When individuals are exposed to foreign cultural content online, the cultural values they encounter may conflict with the local traditions and identity frameworks they have developed over time. If the incoming cultural resources align with and reinforce their existing identity, this can serve to strengthen both individual and collective self-understanding. However, when the incoming culture is dominant or assertive in nature, it may exert a negative—or even destabilizing— influence on one’s worldview, life philosophy, and value orientation. Such influence can potentially disrupt established cultural linkages, leading individuals or groups into a state of identity crisis.

In cases where foreign cultural content is passively accepted—especially when it is accompanied by the rejection of one’s indigenous culture—individuals or collectives may experience a loss of cultural selfhood. This cultural dislocation can result in ideological shifts that undermine identity cohesion, ultimately leading to negative consequences for the group, society, or nation at large. Understanding and reinforcing cultural subjectivity, therefore, becomes essential for navigating the challenges posed by the global circulation of cultural narratives and for safeguarding identity in the digital age.

2.4. Deliberations on Resisting Cultural Colonialism from the West and the United States

Cultural colonialism differs fundamentally from traditional territorial occupation. It refers to a form of cultural hegemony in which one country imposes its values, customs, language, and way of life upon others, often leading to the marginalization, assimilation, or even erasure of local cultural traditions. In the contemporary world, a prominent threat arises from the exercise of “soft power” by Western countries—particularly the United States—which exert widespread influence over other nations through media, ideology, and global cultural flows. The proposition of cultural subjectivity emerges, in part, as a strategic response to such forms of cultural colonialism. It seeks to reaffirm the autonomy, integrity, and vitality of indigenous cultures in the face of global homogenizing pressures.

The United States enhances its global leadership by exporting American values through the exercise of “soft power.” The concept of soft power was first introduced by Harvard professor Joseph Nye, who defined it as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion in international affairs.” He argued that sustaining American global influence requires not only economic strength, military capability, and deterrent power, but also the global appeal of American lifestyles, culture, entertainment, norms, and values (Fraser, 2005). In essence, Nye’s conception of soft power has become a central mechanism by which the United States promotes cultural colonialism. Canadian scholar Matthew Fraser observed that “American soft power is everywhere in the world—even in those regions that are hostile to liberal democracy and free-market capitalism, elite groups find American soft power increasingly irresistible” (Fraser, 2005). Capitalizing on the opportunities provided by globalized media, the United States exercises its influence over global populations through films, television, pop music, fast food, and other culturally symbolic forms. For instance,

“Hollywood is becoming a ubiquitous, glamorous palace of global entertainment, promoting the American way of life through a lavish network of themed dining venues” (Fraser, 2005). Meanwhile, American television and pop music subtly shape the preferences of youth and general audiences in other countries, while global marketing of fast food brands such as Coca-Cola and McDonald’s increasingly appeals to younger generations worldwide. Through this wide-reaching exportation of soft power, American culture exerts pressure on local traditions and value systems in other countries, thereby weakening indigenous cultural subjectivity and threatening cultural sovereignty.

The cultural colonialism of the United States and other Western powers is prominently manifested in the global dissemination of neoliberal ideology. As both an economic and political theory, neoliberalism emphasizes market liberalization, minimal state intervention, and the primacy of private property rights. Under the conditions of globalization, the transnational diffusion of neoliberalism has not only facilitated the global circulation of cultural products and services but has also exerted significant pressure on national cultures and the construction of mainstream ideologies in various countries. For instance, in the Chinese context, it has been observed that “in practice, Marxist doctrines have been marginalized, trivialized, and reduced to mere slogans in certain fields, losing its voice in some disciplines, absent from textbooks, and silenced in academic forums” (IPHLCC, 2018). With financial backing from various foundations and the active endorsement of certain intellectuals across different countries, neoliberalism has gained sweeping influence in the global academic community. “In recent years, it has become fashionable in the fields of philosophy and economics to cite Hayek, Coase, and Friedman as authorities, and the blind faith in neoliberal discourse has become a new dogma” (Liu, 2019). “Neoliberalism’s triad of policies in the economic sphere, its advocacy of constitutional democracy in the political sphere, its wholesale admiration of Western culture in the cultural sphere, its promotion of personalized welfare in the social sphere, its propagation of ‘universal values’ in the realm of value systems, and its emphasis on ideological pluralism have, for a time, posed serious harm to the ideological construction in our country” (Jing, 2017). The widespread embrace of neoliberalism in academic circles worldwide essentially constitutes a form of cultural colonialism, using neoliberal discourse as a pretext and capitalizing on the West’s dominance in global media and academic publishing to exert cultural influence while simultaneously generating profit. This dynamic helps explain why General Secretary Xi Jinping has consistently emphasized the importance of “writing academic papers on the soil of the motherland” (Xi, 2023).

3. The Emerging Connotations of Cultural Subjectivity in the New Era

In the context of the new era, cultural subjectivity emphasizes the proactive preservation and innovation of local culture amid the broad currents of globalization and digitalization. It aims to foster pluralistic yet cohesive cultural identities and to advance the sustainable development of culture and the flourishing of global cultural diversity through critical thinking and cross-cultural collaboration. The notion of cultural subjectivity in this new era exhibits emerging connotations, primarily encompassing the redefinition of the relationship between globalization and local cultures, the innovation and dissemination of culture in the digital age, the construction of identity within multicultural environments, the cultivation of cultural consciousness and critical thinking, and the enhancement of cross-cultural communication and cooperation.

3.1. Repositioning Globalization and Local Culture

With the deepening of globalization, the interaction and mutual influence among diverse cultures have become increasingly prominent. On the one hand, the rapid expansion of globalization has drawn local cultures into the currents of global cultural exchange; on the other hand, many nations have intensified efforts to safeguard their cultural heritage. Within this context, the notion of cultural subjectivity in the new era underscores the necessity for individuals and communities to reposition and actively defend their local cultures. This process involves not only preserving traditional culture from being eroded by cultural homogenization, but also asserting the distinctiveness and vitality of local traditions in global dialogues. By doing so, cultural subjectivity contributes to the coexistence of cultural diversity and fosters a more balanced and inclusive global cultural order.

Nations around the world have increasingly emphasized the protection of traditional culture in the context of globalization. Traditional culture, shaped through the long-term accumulation of historical and social practices, constitutes the distinctive cultural identity of each nation. The valuable elements of traditional culture occupy a central position within national cultural systems, as “excellent traditional culture is the foundation for a nation and a people to inherit and develop. If it is lost, the spiritual lifeline is severed” (Xi, 2022). Given its foundational role in cultural continuity and national development, protecting traditional culture has become a pressing imperative. However, the accelerated flows of globalization present substantial challenges to such preservation. While globalization facilitates cultural exchange, it

also risks subjecting traditional cultures to homogenizing pressures that may erode their autonomy and uniqueness. A culture that loses its subjectivity becomes hollow and devalued, placing its bearer nation at risk of cultural crisis. In response to these potential threats, nations are re-evaluating the impact of globalization on their indigenous cultural systems and formulating corresponding cultural policies. These measures aim to safeguard national cultural subjectivity, ensure the survival of traditional heritage with its unique attributes, and enable traditional culture to thrive within the globalized order by fulfilling its intended functions and significance.

Nations actively present the unique charm of their indigenous cultures in global cultural exchanges. In the new era, the emphasis on cultural subjectivity is not merely a reactive stance against cultural encroachment but also a proactive effort to highlight the distinctiveness and appeal of local cultures in intercultural dialogue. Cultural uniqueness manifests across three dimensions: material civilization, spiritual civilization, and institutional civilization. Material civilization is reflected in cultural artifacts and achievements that, having withstood the test of time and shaped by the people, serve as national cultural emblems recognized both domestically and internationally—such as the Great Wall or the Terracotta Warriors in China. Spiritual civilization is evident in a nation’s philosophical reflections on the relationships among human beings, nature, society, and the self—embodied, for instance, in China’s classical texts like the *Four Books and Five Classics*, or its traditions of poetry and lyrical expression. Institutional civilization is represented by the political and legal systems developed to maintain social order, such as China’s system of the National People’s Congress. Each layer of cultural expression embodies the core values, spiritual aspirations, and philosophical insights of a nation. As Xi Jinping stated, “What is national is also international” (Anonymous, 2021). By actively showcasing their cultural particularities, nations invigorate their cultural vitality and ensure that local traditions not only withstand the tides of global exchange but also emerge renewed and revitalized.

3.2. Cultural Innovation and Dissemination in the Digital Era

In today’s world, the continuous advancement of internet technologies such as cloud computing, big data, and artificial intelligence has ushered humanity into the digital era. The evolution of digital technologies has profoundly transformed the ways in which culture is created, disseminated, and received. Within the context of the new era, cultural subjectivity is no longer confined to the preservation and transmission of traditional heritage; rather, it is increasingly manifested in the capacity to innovate and communicate culture through digital means. Individuals and communities are now able to utilize social media, online platforms, and other digital channels to create and share culturally distinctive content, thereby shaping and promoting local cultural identities on a global scale.

Cultural innovation in the digital era has undergone a significant transformation, shifting away from traditional paradigms and generating new dynamics and characteristics. From the perspective of cultural creators, innovation has moved from a centralized model dominated by elite intellectuals to a diversified model involving multiple agents. Traditionally, cultural content production was largely controlled by a narrow group of cultural elites, with print media serving as the primary vehicle for transmission. In contrast, the digital age has enabled a decentralization of cultural production, empowering ordinary individuals to participate actively in cultural creation and dissemination. This expansion of cultural agents has substantially increased both participation and the potential for innovation. In terms of methods, cultural innovation has transitioned from relying on singular, manual processes to incorporating diverse, technologically enhanced approaches. The rise of generative artificial intelligence has further advanced the means by which cultural products are created, allowing for the synthesis of traditional elements with contemporary demands to produce a broader spectrum of cultural forms that better respond to the public’s growing appetite for diversity. Regarding sources of cultural material, the digital age has also diversified access to inspiration. The everyday use of digital technologies in work and life generates vast amounts of data in various formats—text, images, videos, audio, comics, and symbols—which serve as rich resources for creative production. These data repositories offer what has been described as “a fissionable energy with explosive potential” (Wang and Shang, 2022), enabling cultural innovation on an unprecedented scale. The transformation across these dimensions—agents, methods, and materials—has created fertile ground for individuals and collectives to express and assert cultural subjectivity more dynamically in the digital age.

Cultural dissemination in the digital age has undergone significant transformation. Digital technologies have integrated various terminal systems into mobile devices, facilitating cultural transmission for individuals and collectives alike. Traditionally, cultural dissemination encompassed several dimensions, including the subject, object, content, and mode of dissemination. In the digital context, each of these dimensions has experienced notable shifts. The dissemination subject has transitioned from being predominantly controlled by state-run publicity departments to a collaborative landscape where traditional media and social media platforms coexist. As noted, “The changes brought by digital technology to the media world are marked by an expansion in media types and the blurring of boundaries, with individuals

beginning to play a leading role. As a result, the media has entered a self-media era” (Ouyang *et al.*, 2018; Wang and Shang, 2022). In this self-media environment, cultural dissemination has become multi-agent in nature. The content of dissemination has evolved from relatively uniform to increasingly diverse. A greater number of cultural agents are now able to share culturally specific content via online platforms, enabling audiences to access a wider array of cultural expressions. The reach of dissemination has expanded from local to global. The digital age has flattened traditional communication hierarchies, allowing individuals to access cultural content from different regions and countries, thereby significantly broadening the scope of cultural exchange. Furthermore, the methods of dissemination have shifted from being book-centered to a hybrid model that integrates both print and digital platforms. As (IPHLCC, 2021) notes, “The internet is an important vehicle for spreading excellent human culture and promoting positive energy.” While the value of traditional printed materials remains, the digital age increasingly emphasizes leveraging the internet’s benefits to circulate electronic books and other forms of digital knowledge, thereby enhancing accessibility for the public. The evolution in the subjects, content, scope, and methods of cultural dissemination reflects a broader manifestation of cultural subjectivity in the new era, highlighting how individuals and collectives are reclaiming agency in the global cultural sphere.

3.3. Identity Construction in a Multicultural Environment

In the context of deepening economic globalization, “the international community is increasingly becoming a community of shared destiny where you are in me and I am in you” (IPHLCC, 2021). Within this community, the interaction, integration, and contestation among diverse cultures have fostered a complex and pluralistic cultural environment. In such a setting, individuals and collectives are increasingly required to navigate multiple cultural roles—as cultural inheritors, intermediaries, creators, preservers, and learners. The notion of cultural subjectivity in the new era emphasizes agency and self-positioning in this process. It focuses on how individuals and groups locate themselves amid diverse cultural values and lifestyles, and how they engage in intercultural dialogue and fusion while preserving the distinctiveness of their own cultural identity.

Individuals or collectives must navigate their cultural positioning amidst diverse value systems and lifestyles. In a multicultural environment, establishing one’s place involves several interrelated strategies. First, enhancing mutual understanding and respect through the study of different countries’ historical and cultural contexts serves as a foundation. As stated, “mutual respect, solidarity, and harmonious coexistence represent the right path for the progress of human civilization” (Anonymous, 2023). Effective intercultural communication requires an open-minded spirit of inclusivity—“embracing diversity with generosity” and engaging in “mutual respect, appreciation, learning, and exchange” (IPHLCC, 2021). This approach fosters cross-cultural empathy and mitigates prejudice and bias. Second, cultural positioning is achieved by maintaining a firm sense of identity. In the process of intercultural dialogue, individuals and groups must remain anchored in their cultural traditions and core values, preserving their cultural identity to avoid disorientation or cultural loss. Third, new forms of cultural expression can emerge through intercultural synthesis. “Exchange and mutual learning are essential to the development of civilizations” (Xi, 2022), and in this spirit, individuals and collectives may experiment with blending diverse cultural elements to generate innovative forms of expression that facilitate deeper dialogue. Fourth, cultural positioning is supported by the flexible adaptation of roles in multicultural interactions. As individuals and collectives engage in intercultural contexts, they often assume multiple cultural identities. Thus, it becomes necessary to strengthen cultural adaptability and develop the capacity to shift between roles effectively, thereby identifying and reinforcing one’s position in a pluralistic cultural environment.

Individuals and collectives must engage in dialogue and integration with other cultures. The construction of cultural identity entails not only locating one’s position within diverse cultural values and lifestyles, but also maintaining a balance between preserving cultural distinctiveness and engaging in intercultural dialogue and integration. Among these, safeguarding the uniqueness of one’s own culture serves as the foundational dimension, while dialogue and integration function as necessary complements. Therefore, greater emphasis must be placed on effective measures to reinforce the former. First, cultural innovation and development must be grounded in the study and inheritance of national traditional culture. As emphasized, “outstanding traditional culture is the spiritual lifeline of a nation; to lose it is to sever one’s cultural vitality.” Hence, cultural vitality and contemporaneity can only be sustained when individuals or collectives actively engage in the study of traditional culture, thereby ensuring that “development is achieved through inheritance, and inheritance is revitalized through development” (Xi, 2014). Second, it is essential to promote core national values. “Core values are the spiritual bond of a nation and the shared moral foundation of a country. Without them, a nation loses its soul and direction” (Xi, 2015). Core values are vital to every society; individuals and collectives must internalize and embody them in order to inherit the national spirit and uphold cultural uniqueness. Third, cultural identity should be enhanced through education and public communication. Educational institutions

should implement curricula in history and cultural studies to ensure the systematic transmission of traditional values. In addition, leveraging digital media platforms can raise public awareness of national cultural heritage. Through a combination of educational and promotional strategies, cultural identity and confidence can be significantly strengthened. On the basis of preserving one's own cultural uniqueness, meaningful international exchanges and dialogues should also be undertaken to learn from the strengths of other cultures, showcase the uniqueness of one's own heritage, and foster a deeper sense of identity within a pluralistic global context.

3.4. Cultural Consciousness and the Cultivation of Critical Thinking

In the new era, cultural subjectivity emphasizes that individuals and collectives must possess a clear and conscious understanding of their national culture, while also applying critical thinking to examine both its strengths and limitations. This dual perspective implies not only a commitment to the inheritance and preservation of valuable cultural legacies, but also a reflective reassessment of those traditional elements that may no longer align with contemporary realities. Through such critical engagement, local cultures can be made more open, inclusive, and adaptable to the evolving demands of the times.

Individuals and collectives are called upon to inherit and safeguard the valuable cultural heritage of their nations. Cultural heritage, formed through long-term historical and cultural practices, represents a nation's irreplaceable legacy. As emphasized in policy discourse, "we must protect the cultural heritage passed down by our predecessors" (Party, 2017) and simultaneously "make effective use of historical and cultural heritage" (Xi, 2023). Preservation efforts must be undertaken through multiple dimensions. First, comprehensive surveys and scientific research on cultural heritage should be strengthened. Professional teams should be organized to investigate the origins, values, and preservation needs of cultural assets, thereby laying a solid empirical foundation for strategic protection and transmission. Second, dedicated heritage management institutions should be mobilized to oversee and coordinate preservation efforts. These specialized bodies can promote heritage protection through legislation, funding, public education, and other mechanisms, ensuring that cultural heritage is both respected and functional within contemporary society. Third, concrete preservation measures must be adopted. For tangible cultural heritage, innovative conservation methods—including categorization, repair, and monitoring—should be employed to ensure integrity and stability. For intangible cultural heritage, its cultural significance must be fully acknowledged, with focused efforts to cultivate a new generation of inheritors and enthusiasts, ensuring the continuity of traditional knowledge and skills. Finally, international cooperation and exchange should be promoted. Engagement with global organizations and other nations enables the sharing of preservation practices and the adoption of advanced techniques, fostering a shared commitment to the protection and transmission of cultural heritage worldwide.

Individuals and collectives must engage in reflective critique and adaptive revision of elements within traditional culture that have become outdated. While it is essential to inherit and develop a nation's cultural heritage, a critical stance must also be adopted to identify and reform those aspects of tradition that no longer align with contemporary societal needs—what Xi (2013) refers to as the process of "discarding the dross." These "inappropriate elements" of traditional culture are often products of historical conditions that are no longer relevant in the current era. To address this, critical cultural engagement must proceed along several lines. First, a historical lens should be employed to understand the contextual origins of these outdated practices, identifying the socio-political and cultural circumstances that gave rise to them. This historical understanding forms the basis for informed transformation. Second, individuals and groups must apply critical thinking to evaluate these cultural elements, diagnose their limitations, and identify points of intervention for improvement. Third, a collective approach is encouraged: scholars, practitioners, and diverse stakeholders should be mobilized to engage in open dialogue, facilitating interdisciplinary inquiry into traditional elements in need of revision and collaboratively proposing viable solutions. Finally, public discourse and media should be strategically employed to guide societal perceptions. Through public education and constructive debate, citizens can be encouraged to relinquish obsolete cultural components while embracing those aspects that resonate with contemporary values. By activating these multidimensional strategies, traditional culture can undergo a process of renewal—eliminating incongruous elements while revitalizing its enduring strengths—thereby aligning more closely with the evolving demands of modern society.

3.5. Enhancing Intercultural Communication and Collaborative Competence

Against the backdrop of globalization, intercultural communication and cooperation have become increasingly vital. The ability to engage effectively across cultures is now recognized as a key competency for addressing contemporary challenges and advancing shared development. Within the framework of cultural subjectivity in the new era, emphasis is placed on the proactive participation and constructive contribution of individuals and groups in intercultural dialogue.

This entails identifying common ground while respecting cultural differences, fostering mutual understanding, and enhancing collaboration among diverse cultural communities to jointly confront global issues. To effectively engage in intercultural communication and cooperation, individuals and collectives must develop a comprehensive set of competencies. First, intercultural awareness is fundamental. This refers to the subjective understanding of cultural differences and commonalities encountered in intercultural interactions. Only with such awareness can individuals recognize variations in thinking patterns and behaviors shaped by differing cultural contexts. Second, communicative competence in intercultural settings is essential. This includes linguistic proficiency, as language serves as a primary gateway to understanding another culture: “Language is the best key to understanding a country” (Anonymous, 2022). Beyond verbal communication, individuals and groups must also cultivate non-verbal communication skills and the ability to navigate cultural conflicts. Third, the development of cultural intelligence is critical. Cultural intelligence encompasses the capacity to understand and adapt to diverse cultural norms, values, and practices. It enables respectful engagement with cultural differences and facilitates effective collaboration in multicultural environments. Fourth, cooperation and collaboration skills are necessary to build shared goals and address challenges collectively. Intercultural exchange demands a cooperative mindset and the ability to work jointly across cultural boundaries. Finally, cultural leadership is required to guide teams in multicultural contexts. Individuals and collectives should possess the ability to lead, coordinate, and mobilize efforts across cultural divides to achieve intercultural communication and cooperation objectives.

In today’s world, rising unilateralism, protectionism, and hegemonic behavior are aggravating deficits in governance, trust, development, and peace (Xi, 2022), posing profound challenges to global development and complicating efforts to address climate change, poverty, disease, and hunger. Among the various strategies to tackle these pressing global issues, culture plays an indispensable role. A foundational step in intercultural collaboration is fostering mutual understanding and respect for cultural differences. Cultural actors must develop an informed appreciation of the diverse historical trajectories, social realities, and value systems of different nations. As noted by Xi (2023), “precisely because countries differ in history, culture, and institutions, mutual learning and exchange become essential for shared progress.” Second, the advancement of intercultural dialogue and cooperation must be actively promoted. As Zhang and Wang (2023) suggests, cultural actors should embrace diversity with a spirit of inclusivity, fostering a shared spiritual space characterized by harmony in diversity. This requires engaging in cultural interaction with openness, mutual appreciation, and a commitment to identifying shared interests and common ground across cultural divides. Third, raising awareness and competence in intercultural engagement through targeted education and training is essential. Structured learning opportunities can enhance individuals’ understanding of diverse cultural contexts, thereby strengthening their intercultural awareness and laying a solid foundation for effective communication and collaboration. Finally, sustained cooperation among cultural actors is necessary to generate collective responses to the challenges brought by globalization. Through collaborative efforts, societies can co-develop solutions, leverage synergies, and build resilient partnerships. In sum, strengthening intercultural communication and cooperation capacities not only facilitates mutual understanding and respect but also contributes to the joint resolution of global challenges, thereby advancing the pluralistic and flourishing development of world cultures.

4. Strategies for Strengthening Cultural Subjectivity in the New Era

In the global cultural landscape, all nations share a common concern regarding the preservation and reinforcement of their cultural subjectivity. As the international community increasingly forms a shared destiny, the cultural development of one country inevitably influences and interacts with that of others. Therefore, the consolidation of cultural subjectivity has become a critical issue for all countries. In advancing the development of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics, it is essential to adopt a global perspective—one that harmonizes tradition and future, bridges Eastern and Western civilizations, and integrates theoretical insight with practical engagement. Through mutual learning, understanding, and appreciation, nations can more effectively strengthen their cultural subjectivity and safeguard cultural security in an interconnected world.

4.1. Tradition and the Future: Advancing the Creative Transformation and Innovative Development of Traditional Culture

Traditional culture serves as a vital source of national identity and cultural confidence, embodying profound wisdom and enduring values. Its creative transformation and innovative development not only invigorate cultural vitality but also contribute significantly to the prosperity of both cultural undertakings and the cultural industry. As the crystallization of thousands of years of Chinese civilization, traditional Chinese culture encapsulates the value systems, cognitive

frameworks, and lifestyles of the Chinese people. Within the context of the new era, a key strategy for reinforcing cultural subjectivity lies in harmonizing tradition with future-oriented development. This involves reinterpreting traditional cultural resources through contemporary lenses while preserving their core essence, thereby fostering a dynamic interplay between cultural continuity and societal innovation. By doing so, traditional culture can be revitalized to meet the needs of modern society, enhance cultural creativity, and contribute to the broader goals of educational reform, social cohesion, and global cultural dialogue.

A thorough understanding of traditional culture is a necessary precondition for its creative transformation and innovative development. National traditions are inherently diverse and complex, comprising both progressive and regressive elements, cultural essences and residual dross. Without a clear and systematic review, any attempt at transformation risks being hasty or superficial, potentially undermining efforts to strengthen cultural subjectivity and even producing unintended negative consequences for cultural continuity. To ensure meaningful cultural renewal, it is imperative to possess a nuanced awareness of the content and structure of traditional Chinese culture. This heritage is embodied in classical texts, ritual customs, and material artifacts—each with its own stylistic features, forms, and historical depth. Among these, classical literature remains one of the most extensive and accessible repositories of cultural knowledge. Therefore, traditional culture must be categorized, assessed, and critically interpreted with academic rigor. This process includes identifying and preserving elements with enduring relevance, while discarding those deemed obsolete or incompatible with contemporary values (Fan, 2024). Through such analytic engagement, the core value orientations embedded in traditional Chinese culture—such as *harmony between nature and humanity* (天人合一), *universal harmony among nations* (协和万邦), and *benevolence and compassion* (仁爱)—can be extracted and rearticulated in ways that contribute to addressing the challenges of modern society. In doing so, the foundations for cultural transformation are both intellectually and ethically strengthened, ensuring that innovation is grounded in historical consciousness and aligned with national cultural identity.

Following the systematic consolidation of a nation's traditional cultural resources, the next step lies in the dynamic and context-sensitive utilization of these materials. Given the evolving socio-historical conditions across different eras, the transformation of traditional culture must be pursued with a forward-looking mindset and a commitment to contemporaneity. First, the integration of modern elements into cultural practices enables the creation of cultural products that resonate with the sensibilities of the current generation. This involves an accurate understanding of public cultural preferences and the strategic fusion of tradition with modern design principles to develop culturally grounded yet innovative products. For instance, the incorporation of traditional craftsmanship into contemporary design frameworks has yielded novel forms of cultural creativity that are both marketable and meaningful. Second, the modes of cultural expression must be reimagined through the application of digital technologies. Emerging tools such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence provide unprecedented opportunities to transform the presentation and dissemination of traditional cultural content, thereby expanding its accessibility and relevance. These technologies not only enhance user engagement but also allow for the immersive reinterpretation of cultural heritage in ways aligned with the expectations of digital-native audiences. Third, interdisciplinary integration is key to fostering synergistic innovation. Expanding the intersections between traditional culture and sectors such as education, tourism, and technology can generate composite value and new developmental trajectories. Such cross-sectoral collaboration facilitates the construction of culturally embedded systems that reflect both historical continuity and contemporary adaptability. Finally, the cultivation of culturally innovative talents is essential for sustaining the momentum of tradition-based innovation. Through targeted educational initiatives and supportive policy frameworks, it is possible to nurture a new generation of cultural practitioners equipped to bridge past and future. These individuals are instrumental in ensuring that the essence of traditional culture is not only preserved but also dynamically reinterpreted for emerging societal contexts. In essence, the development of national culture in the contemporary era requires a dual emphasis on transformation and advancement. Drawing from the deep well of traditional wisdom while embracing the imperatives of the present, societies can generate new cultural outcomes that both honor the past and shape the future. The mutual reinforcement of innovation and preservation thus constitutes a vital strategy for strengthening cultural subjectivity in the twenty-first century.

4.2. East and West: Advancing Mutual Learning through the Vision of a Shared Future for Humanity

The consolidation of cultural subjectivity in the new era requires consideration not only from a temporal dimension but also from a spatial one. Across the global landscape, diverse nations have adopted distinct developmental trajectories, giving rise to varied cultural formations. From a spatial perspective, cultures may be broadly categorized into Eastern and Western paradigms, each shaped by unique historical experiences, philosophical foundations, and societal structures. In the metaphorical garden of world civilizations, cultural exchange between the East and the West is not only inevitable

but also indispensable—past, present, and future. However, the differing values and epistemological assumptions that underpin these cultural systems may give rise to misunderstanding or even conflict during intercultural encounters. As such, the imperative to avoid cultural clashes poses a critical challenge to contemporary global society. Within this context, the framework of a “shared future for humanity” provides a constructive paradigm for fostering intercultural understanding. Rooted in mutual respect, inclusivity, and cooperative development, this vision calls for dialogue and mutual learning as essential strategies for bridging cultural divides. Rather than asserting dominance or succumbing to homogenization, it promotes coexistence through recognition of cultural plurality and shared aspirations. Educational institutions, as cultural mediators, play a central role in advancing this vision. By embedding intercultural competencies into curricula, promoting comparative cultural studies, and encouraging collaborative inquiry across borders, education can serve as a catalyst for fostering a deeper appreciation of both difference and commonality. In doing so, it contributes not only to the consolidation of national cultural subjectivity, but also to the cultivation of global citizenship grounded in empathy, equity, and mutual understanding. Ultimately, reinforcing cultural subjectivity through East–West dialogue is not a defensive reaction to globalization, but a proactive strategy for shaping a more harmonious and interconnected global order—where diversity is seen not as a source of division, but as a foundation for collective flourishing.

As history evolves into world history, the formerly insular conditions of local and national self-sufficiency have been increasingly replaced by interdependence across nations in all domains—material and spiritual alike. As noted in classic Marxist thought, “the self-contained and self-sufficient condition of earlier times has been replaced by a universal interdependence of nations... the intellectual creations of individual nations become common property” (Central, 2012). In the context of rapid global transportation and the widespread use of the internet, the world has effectively become a “global village,” where cross-national interaction has become more immediate, and cultural products are increasingly shared across borders. However, the profound differences in cultural traditions, epistemologies, and value systems between Eastern and Western societies have also created potential tensions in the process of cultural exchange. Such encounters may result in misunderstandings, confrontation, or even cultural conflict—undermining not only the development of national cultures but also the cultural rights and dignity of peoples. In this global context, the guiding philosophy behind intercultural engagement becomes critically important. The notion of a “shared future for humanity” provides an inclusive and forward-looking paradigm that regards all peoples as interconnected within a common destiny. It emphasizes mutual respect, cultural plurality, and the collective well-being of humankind. Rather than advocating for cultural assimilation or dominance, this vision calls for a posture of openness and coexistence, urging nations to approach each other’s cultural expressions with generosity and humility. The concept of a shared future underscores the importance of treating other cultures not as threats, but as complementary sources of insight and inspiration. As a foundational principle for intercultural dialogue and cooperation, it offers a normative framework for advancing equitable cultural exchange in a way that affirms diversity while promoting solidarity. For educators and cultural practitioners alike, this vision serves as a compass for cultivating intercultural awareness, promoting ethical global engagement, and building a more harmonious world order.

4.3. Theory and Practice: Advancing Cultural Development to Safeguard National Cultural Security

The reinforcement of cultural subjectivity necessitates a multidimensional perspective—one that spans temporal depth, cross-cultural spatiality, and the dialectic between theory and practice. Whether aiming to transform and rejuvenate traditional cultural forms or to promote equitable cultural exchanges between nations, such processes must be guided by robust theoretical frameworks and realized through concrete cultural practice. Only through this interplay can national cultural security be meaningfully upheld. In the context of increasing globalization and cultural interdependence, safeguarding cultural subjectivity requires not only the protection of cultural heritage but also the cultivation of an active, future-oriented cultural agency. It involves creating policies that foster resilience, inclusivity, and openness to dialogue—anchored in national identity yet responsive to global dynamics. To this end, countries should strengthen their cultural policy frameworks under the guiding principle of a shared human destiny. This entails refining institutional mechanisms that support intercultural learning, mutual respect, and policy alignment across borders. Within such a paradigm, cultural development becomes both a sovereign right and a shared responsibility, enabling national cultures to engage globally while retaining their distinctiveness. The dynamic interaction between cultural theory and practice thus emerges as a critical mechanism for consolidating cultural subjectivity. It enables nations to adaptively respond to challenges, enhance cultural vitality, and ensure that cultural security is not merely preserved but continuously co-constructed in a pluralistic world.

As foundational guidance for national cultural practice, the formulation of culturally responsive policy plays a pivotal role in sustaining cultural development and ensuring cultural security. As with revolutionary theory being the

precondition for revolutionary movement (Central, 2012), effective cultural practice likewise depends on the presence of coherent and contextually appropriate cultural policy. Domestically, cultural policy functions as a crucial component of the ideological superstructure. It not only safeguards national cultural sovereignty but also actively contributes to broader economic and social development. Internationally, the construction and implementation of cultural policies shape the nature and effectiveness of intercultural exchanges. Conservative or isolationist policies may hinder mutual engagement, while open and inclusive frameworks tend to promote cross-national cultural communication and collaboration. Given this dual importance, policy formulation must be both locally grounded and globally attuned. First, cultural policy should be developed with a longitudinal historical consciousness. Policymakers must integrate insights from both enduring traditions and contemporary transformations, approaching policy design within the framework of long-term cultural evolution. This approach allows for the preservation of valuable heritage while fostering innovation grounded in experiential learning and practical engagement. Second, effective policy design must balance domestic realities with international perspectives. While responding to internal cultural development needs, policies should also reflect a commitment to global cultural dialogue. Such openness requires a comparative vision and a willingness to adopt inclusive, dialogical stances that facilitate cultural convergence and mutual enrichment. Finally, national cultural security must serve as a guiding principle across all stages of cultural policy formulation. Whether reflecting on historical legacies or engaging with current global dynamics, cultural security should remain central to ensuring the resilience and sustainability of national cultural identities. In safeguarding this dimension, states can better protect the cultural rights of their citizens and contribute constructively to global cultural pluralism.

Under the guidance of scientifically grounded cultural policy, nations must ensure that such policies are effectively translated into practical cultural action. The safeguarding of national cultural security necessitates a multifaceted approach involving proactive individual and collective participation, mutual respect in international exchange, and sustained endogenous innovation. First, cultural engagement must be facilitated through increased interpersonal and collective exchange. Individuals serve as the primary agents of cultural practice, acting as both conveyors and interpreters of cultural meaning. To strengthen mutual understanding and accelerate the diffusion of national cultures, states should actively promote cross-border mobility and dialogue. In this process, it is essential that individuals transcend ethnic and national biases, adopting a perspective of parity and mutual appreciation. Such an approach fosters the ethos of “appreciating the beauty of others and achieving shared beauty,” thereby advancing cultural harmony. Second, cultural exchange must not be co-opted as a vehicle for ideological imposition. In contemporary international relations, cultural diplomacy is sometimes manipulated to exert ideological influence, thereby undermining the cultural sovereignty of other nations. To prevent such infringement and to ensure a just and respectful global cultural environment, it is imperative that cultural interactions be premised on the recognition of and respect for national cultural autonomy. States must refrain from employing any form of ideological penetration under the guise of cultural cooperation. Lastly, the vitality of a nation’s culture must be continually renewed through innovation and the dynamic integration of tradition and modernity. To preserve cultural security in the long term, the emphasis must be placed on stimulating internal cultural momentum. This involves aligning historical heritage with contemporary realities and implementing diverse, context-sensitive strategies tailored to national conditions. Such measures should aim to enhance the cultural dynamism, influence, and expressive potential of national traditions. By unleashing the full spectrum of cultural energy, nations can assert their cultural strength and resilience in a rapidly changing global context. Through these coordinated efforts—facilitating people-to-people exchange, resisting ideological encroachment, and fostering culturally rooted innovation—nations can effectively reinforce their cultural sovereignty and ensure the sustained security and flourishing of their cultural systems.

5. Discussion

President Xi Jinping’s theoretical articulation of cultural subjectivity demonstrates distinctive characteristics in its responsiveness to contemporary conditions, its conceptual depth, and the practical relevance of its reinforcement strategies. These features offer both theoretical grounding and actionable guidance for the construction of cultural subjectivity in the new era, enabling China’s cultural development to advance in step with societal transformation. Moreover, they contribute to enhancing national cultural soft power and achieving the goals of cultural confidence and cultural prosperity.

The proposition of cultural subjectivity as a major theoretical construct reflects a keen awareness of its significance in preserving and promoting global cultural diversity, addressing cultural conflict and homogenization, and safeguarding identity in the face of cultural imperialism. In the context of the new era, cultural subjectivity acquires multidimensional

meaning—encompassing the reconfiguration of the relationship between globalization and local culture, innovation and dissemination of culture in the digital era, identity formation within multicultural environments, and the development of cultural consciousness, critical thinking, and intercultural communication and cooperation skills.

Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize and address the real-world factors that hinder the consolidation of cultural subjectivity. This requires a comprehensive and multidimensional approach—bridging tradition and modernity, integrating Eastern and Western perspectives, and combining theoretical insights with practical strategies. Strengthening national cultural subjectivity through such an approach is integral to ensuring cultural security in a complex global environment.

6. Conclusion

As China continues to explore and advance the development of cultural subjectivity, there is growing confidence that sustained commitment will foster a more prosperous, inclusive, and pluralistic cultural landscape. In doing so, China contributes both intellectual insight and practical capacity to the broader endeavor of building a shared future for humanity.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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