The Way to Treat National Traditional Culture — On the Theoretical Similarities and Differences between Cultural Nationalism and China's Cultural Confidence

Zhu Chen

School of Foreign Languages, Northwestern Polytechnical University, Shaanxi, China
Zhuchen5053@163.com

Abstract: *In the 18th century, the German philosopher Herder, faced with the division of the German nation and the encroachment of French thought on German culture, put forward the theory of Cultural Nationalism, pointing out that the establishment of a unified nation should be based on traditional culture. China's theory of Cultural Confidence similarly emphasizes drawing sustenance from traditional culture to promote the construction of a strong social and cultural nation while enhancing national self-confidence. It can be said that both the theory of Cultural Nationalism and Cultural Confidence regard traditional culture as the key to unify the national spirit and resolve the difficulties of national reality. On the basis of sorting out the theoretical connotation, this thesis explores the ways of treating traditional culture in the new era by comparing the specific practices of the two in treating traditional culture.*

Keywords: National Traditional Culture; Cultural Nationalism; Cultural Confidence.

1. INTRODUCTION

The 18th-century German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder put forward the theory Cultural Nationalism, which advocated focusing on the national traditional culture. Herder viewed the German nation as a cultural nation, which views the nation as a naturally growing organism and makes national culture and national spirit at the cultural level a new standard for defining national unity. And three centuries later in China, the concept of Cultural Confidence was first put forward in the thirteenth collective study of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee in 2014, in which it was proposed to "enhance cultural confidence and value self-confidence"; in 2016, at the "1st July speech", General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed that Cultural Confidence be regarded as the "Fourth Confidence" in building socialism with Chinese characteristics after Road Confidence, Theoretical Confidence, and Institutional Confidence. After the 18th National Congress of the Party, the discussion of Cultural Confidence was gradually systematized, and Cultural Confidence was elevated to the same theoretical position as the "three confidences," highlighting the fact that Cultural Confidence has become a key element in the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and it has become a key element in the development of China's economy. At present, most of the articles in the academic circles have made detailed compilation and discussion on the process of putting forward the Cultural Confidence and the connotation research; however, these articles are more characterized by current political propaganda, and seldom carry out more in-depth discussion from the perspective of cultural policy. This thesis focuses on comparing Cultural Confidence and Cultural Nationalism, starting from the characteristics of the two cultural policies in treating traditional culture, and demonstrating the characteristics and advantages of China's Cultural Confidence by comparing the attitudes of Herder's Cultural Nationalism towards traditional culture.

2. CONNOTATION OF CULTURAL CONFIDENCE

In the 21st century, economic globalization and cultural diversification have swept the world. China has seized the opportunities brought by the rapid development of economy, science and technology, and made historic achievements, becoming a force to be reckoned with in the international arena, while the trend of cultural diversification in the world has brought a great challenge to the development of our national culture: the provocation of the hegemony of the West and the universal values. Western countries are using all kinds of subtle ways to export their own national values, causing severe impact on the unique development of our culture. Against this international background, the 18th Party Congress for the first time elevated Cultural Confidence to the same level of importance as the other three Cofidence. Among the three sources of Cultural Confidence in China, the

excellent traditional Chinese culture occupies a unique position. The values of the Chinese nation and the outstanding qualities of the Chinese people are embedded in Chinese excellent traditional culture, which is the foundation for building a strong socialist culture and the driving force for the Chinese nation to move forward. General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized the unique position of Chinese outstanding traditional culture: "As one of the sources of Cultural Confidence, Chinese outstanding traditional culture contains rich spiritual nutrition, is the spiritual lifeblood of the development of the Chinese nation, and has created the unique national spirit of Chinese civilization[1]." The theory of Cultural Confidence regards the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation as one of the three major sources, affirming the special status of the excellent traditional culture, while also focusing on tapping the realistic value it can play in the new era. "The solid foundation and outstanding advantage of our firm cultural confidence lies in China's excellent traditional culture. The vast and profound Chinese excellent traditional culture, the knowledge and wisdom and rational thinking accumulated by Chinese people over thousands of years are our deepest soft power[2]."

China's Cultural Confidence, in the face of threats to its own culture, proposes that we should be confident in our own culture, give a unique position to China's excellent traditional culture, return to our country's long-lasting cultural sources to enhance the national cultural confidence, cohesion of the spirit of our nationals, so that the traditional culture can play a great role in the reality of the appeal. This idea has similar logical connotations to the theory of Cultural Nationalism put forward by Herder in the 18th century. However, comparing with Herder's description of the specific practices of traditional culture, the two theories are still very different.

3. THE THEORY OF CULTURE NATIONALISM

The German Holy Roman Empire was established in 962 A.D. After the struggle between the imperial power and the royal power, the Reformation and the Thirty Years' War, in the 18th century, the German Holy Roman Empire had long existed in name only and was in a state of division and fragmentation, whereas the Enlightenment, an anti-feudal and anti-authoritarian movement, was in full swing in France, which caused the rational trend to sweep through Europe. "As France became the intellectual and cultural center of all Europe and the world, French culture began to invade Germany on a large scale[3]." At that time, French culture had become the weathervane of German society, and the imitation and pursuit of French culture by the Germans had reached a very fanatical point. "A French four-wheeled carriage is also better than a fast runner, and a French wig suits a German head better than German hair, and likewise German hair cannot be combed with any other comb than a French comb, and the same is true of powder[4]." For Germany, the present state of fragmentation and the blind worship of French culture put its future in jeopardy. In order to save Germany in distress, Herder proposed the theory of Cultural Nationalism. He tried to put an end to the long division of Germany by uniting the whole nation on the basis of its traditional culture.

Unlike the traditional political conception of the word "nation", Herder's Cultural Nationalism considered nations as natural organisms based on the national spirit and national culture, and "have the characteristics of human beings: they have souls and life cycles[5]." And for a nation with a life cycle, the national spirit determines its growth process and is the core and root of the whole nation. And "national culture is the product of the national spirit of every national organism[6]." National culture and national spirit become the basis of national unity and an important symbol for distinguishing different nations.

Combined with the concrete reality of the German nation, Herder believed that the reason why Germany had been in a long-term divided stage was because of the cultural rupture since the Middle Ages, which had caused Germany to lose the unique national spirit and the true national culture of the nation. Therefore, only by going back to the source of national culture in the distant Middle Ages, rebuilding the national culture and regaining the lost national spirit, can the reality of the split situation be ended. "The German tradition has been interrupted by the foreign traditions introduced during the Renaissance. Therefore the German nation needs to return to the Middle Ages[7]."

To sum up, the Cultural Nationalism proposed by Herder believed that the national spirit could be united by digging up medieval culture and collecting vernacular folk songs, thus realizing the unity of the German nation at the cultural level. However, as to the specific practice, i.e., how to connect Cultural Nationalism with the German reality in the 18th century and how to utilize traditional culture to unite the German national spirit, Herder paid little attention to it in his thought theory compared to the Cultural Confidence in China.

4. HOW TO DEAL WITH NATIONAL TRADITIONAL CULTURE

4.1 Respect to National Traditional Culture

While the theories of Cultural Nationalism and Cultural Confidence are similar in terms of emphasizing the power of traditional national culture and attempting to resolve the reality of the nation's predicament by uniting the national spirit, they differ in terms of the specific operation of the treatment of traditional culture. Whether it is the theory of Cultural Nationalism put forward by Herder in the 18th century or China's Cultural Confidence three hundred years later, all of them focus on the source of their own culture, trying to revitalize traditional culture, bring into play the realistic value of ancient national culture, and use the power of traditional culture to solve the challenges and threats faced by the nation at present.

4.2 A Critical View of Traditional Culture

How to view traditional culture correctly is the second step in bringing it back to life in the present and contemporary context. In the 18th century Herder believed that what the people created was excellent, impeccable, and the only path to the re-realization of Germanic splendor and glory. "All that is simple and natural and unadorned in the people is praised." "The only way to save a people from a cultural rupture is to collect the folk songs that have survived[8]." Herder's theory looks at the historical role of folk songs, epics, ballads and folklore, but ignores both the best and the worst parts of traditional culture, so his view is somewhat one-sided and puritanical. The theory of Cultural Confidence in 21st century China, on the other hand, suggests that people need to rationally face the rich and all-encompassing traditional culture. General Secretary Xi Jinping once pointed out, "In the process of its formation and development, traditional culture will inevitably be constrained and influenced by the level of people's understanding at that time, the conditions of the times, and the limitations of the social system, and thus will inevitably contain things that are old and outdated or have become dross[9]." The theory of Cultural Confidence calls for a critical approach to traditional national culture and the elimination of the dross and negative parts of it from traditional Chinese culture. And the positive parts of traditional culture, which are still useful today, need to be remodeled and supplemented to a certain extent in terms of both content and form, so that through critical assimilation, these traditional cultures can be brought into line with the requirements of the development of the new era. In addition, Cultural Confidence requires traditional culture to maintain "lifelong learning" as society develops. Traditional culture must constantly renew and improve its ideological connotations and forms of expression in accordance with the direction and requirements of the times. In the process of creative development, traditional culture should be oriented towards reality and serve the social reality of contemporary China.

4.3 Drawing on the Strengths of Different National Cultures

The treatment of traditional culture also requires learning to deal with its relationship with different national cultures. Cultural Nationalism believes that different nationalities give birth to different national spirits, affirms the uniqueness of each nation, and believes that each nation has its own standard of happiness; it says that "the value, merits and demerits of cultures cannot be evaluated by universal standards[10]." Herder, however, goes further in his theory by suggesting that the degree of interaction with other peoples affects, or even interferes with, the uniqueness of the nation itself; "If a nation is not able to come into contact and interact with other peoples under the constraints of its natural conditions, or for other reasons, this national identity becomes more and more solid and distinct[11]." In other words, there is an antagonism and contradiction between the cultural exchanges between this nation and other nations, and the self-development of this nation's culture. Herder's view ignores the fact that intercultural communication will actually bring positive impetus to the cultural development of the nation. With the development of economic globalization, international cultural exchanges are getting closer and closer, and the traditional national culture is getting closer and closer to other national cultures. The theory of Cultural Confidence suggests that when Chinese traditional culture undergoes creative transformation and innovative development, it is indispensable to absorb and learn from the excellent achievements of other national cultures. In the process of self-improvement of traditional culture with the development of history, it should not only maintain its own unique ethnicity, but also maintain internationality and inclusiveness. Only in this way can traditional culture expand its international influence, have the right to speak internationally, and eventually form an internationally recognized discourse system.

To summarize, compared with the Cultural Nationalism, the theory of Cultural Confidence in China not only attaches importance to the extraction of the essence of the connotations of traditional culture, but also proposes that in the new era, we have to creatively carry forward the realistic value of the national traditional culture, as well as the problem of communion between it and other national cultures.

5. CONCLUSION

By sorting out the connotations of the two theories of Cultural Nationalism and Cultural Confidence, it is found that the value of the national traditional culture in the present world plays an irreplaceable role in solving the challenges and threats faced by the nation at present. On the basis of the attitude of valuing our own historical culture, but in the process of concrete implementation, compared with the theory of Cultural Nationalism, the theory of Cultural Confidence in China has gone a little farther. Herder focused on searching and collecting the glorious and pure ancient culture of Germany, but gave little thought to how to realize the contemporary value of traditional culture based on reality, and how to deal with the relationship between one's own culture and that of other countries. The theory of Chinese Cultural Confidence, on the other hand, gives scientific guidance to the modernization and development of traditional culture from the perspective of the characteristics of traditional culture and its relationship with the present age and other cultures.

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Author Profile

Zhu Chen, master graduate of Northwestern Polytechnic University. Research direction: German History and Culture.