

The fundamental issues in promoting modern civilization of the Chinese Nation



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Abstract

Since China entered the Xi Jinping Era, the CPC has formally put forward a series of significant theories on China's future development path, including Xi Jinping Thought on Culture. These theories have sparked active discussions and responses within both domestic and international academic and theoretical circles. This paper argues that when analyzing the major relationships between Chinese civilization and other civilizations worldwide, the Chinese path to modernization and the modern civilization of the Chinese Nation, and Chinese culture and its constituent ethnic cultures, we should further elucidate relationships and adhere to the three foundational principles: subjectivity, the contemporaneity of Chinese culture, and the arterial and leading attributes of Chinese culture, which encapsulate the core issues in fostering the modern civilization of Chinese Nation. A proper understanding and nuanced handling of these issues not only bolsters the perpetuation and evolution of China's excellent traditional culture but also propels the trajectory of the Chinese path to modernization and the overarching construction of the modern civilization of Chinese Nation.

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1 Introduction

Since China entered the Xi Jinping Era, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has formally put forward a series of significant theories on China's future development path, including Xi Jinping Thought on Culture. Xi's cultural thoughts put forward a series of new theories and views on Chinese culture, the Chinese path to modernization, the Modern civilization of the Chinese Nation, the forging of a strong sense of community for the Chinese Nation, and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation.

The narrative of modernization has historically emanated from the West, often regarded as an exclusive trajectory of Western development. Non-Western societies were expected to forsake their traditional cultures and conform to a purportedly superior path towards modernity, as delineated by Western technological and moral standards (Inglehart and Baker 2000). However, it was not until the end of World War II, amidst the rapid economic ascent of Asian economies epitomized by Japan and the four Asian Tiger economies, that certain Western scholars commenced a reassessment of Western modernity and its Eurocentric underpinnings, scrutinizing the underlying factors behind Asia's emergence. Scholars like Geert Hofstede underscored the pivotal role of Confucian cultural traditions in propelling Asia's economic prowess (Hofstede and Bond 1988). Concurrently, the faltering of Western modernity, anchored in instrumental rationality, became increasingly apparent, manifesting in economic downturns, ecological degradation, geopolitical conflicts, racial strife, gender inequalities, and other malaises. Therefore exploring alternative pathways to modernization became imperative.

In the late 1970s, China embarked on its reform and opening up policy, initiating a rapid modernization process. For over four decades, industrialization, urbanization, and informatization have since reshaped China's industrial, employment, urban-rural population, and external exchange structures. Sustained rapid economic growth propelled China to become the world's largest industrial manufacturing base and the second-largest economy, prompting a rapid transformation of its economic and social structure, thereby reshaping the state of modern China. Confidence in its path, system, theory, and culture has steadily strengthened. Against this backdrop, the CPC put forth the proposition of "a Chinese path to modernization" at its 20th National Congress in 2022.

Chinese path to modernization represents the "Chinese wisdom, Chinese solution, and Chinese strength" proffered by the CPC to the challenges wrought by Western modernity. It created "a new model for human advancement" and expanded

“the channels for developing countries to achieve modernization. This has offered a new option for countries and nations who want to accelerate development while preserving their independence”.¹

President Xi cogently articulated the pivotal concept of the “subjectivity of Chinese culture,” and clarified the relationship between the Chinese path to modernization and Chinese civilization at a meeting on cultural inheritance and development in Beijing on June 2, 2023: “The rich heritage of Chinese civilization bolsters Chinese modernization. Chinese modernization seeks to build upon, rather than erase, China’s ancient civilization; it has been cultivated within China, not imported from any other country; and it has stemmed from the renewal, not the disruption, of Chinese civilization (Xi 2023b) ”.

The system of Regional Ethnic Autonomy is one of the basic political systems in China, which enriches the great practice of the socialist democratic process and greatly guarantees and promotes the development of ethnic regions. Regional Ethnic Autonomy and the Party’s ethnic work have been summarized as one of China’s strengths which should be upheld in the new era: “upholding equality between all ethnic groups, forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese Nation, and working together for common prosperity”². At the Central Conference on Ethnic Affairs in 2021, General Secretary Xi Jinping advocated for “the innovative development of the Party’s ethnic initiatives and the judicious grasp of the interplay between Chinese culture and its diverse ethnic tapestry.”

These propositions have sparked active discussions and responses within both domestic and international academic and theoretical circles (He 2023; Tang 2023; Zhu 2023; Zou and Zhao 2023). Drawing insights from these seminal discourses, this paper underscores the imperative of navigating three pivotal relationships and elucidating the three cardinal principles underpinning the construction of modern civilization of the Chinese Nation. When analyzing the interaction between Chinese civilization and the broader global tapestry of civilizations, steadfast adherence to the subjectivity of Chinese culture is paramount. Similarly, in assessing the nexus between the Chinese path to modernization and the advancement of the modern civilization of the Chinese Nation, heightened attention to the contemporaneity of Chinese culture is indispensable. Lastly, in dissecting the dynamic between Chinese culture and its diverse ethnic constituents, that is, the cultures of the 56 ethnic groups, it is essential to grasp the trunk and leading attributes of Chinese culture which is created jointly by all ethnic groups.

¹ Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century - Opinion - Chinadaily.com.cn. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202111/17/WS61944b49a310cdd39bc75c01_19.html.

² In “Upholding and improving systems and institutions that ensure the people’s participation in the decision-making process, with continuous progress in socialist democracy” section of “The Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Major Issues Concerning Upholding and Improving the System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Advancing the Modernization of China’s System and Capacity for Governance” adopted at the fourth plenary session of 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Oct. 31, 2019. The decision is a guiding document for upholding and improving socialism with Chinese characteristics and modernizing state governance system and capacity in the new era.

2 Methodology

This study mainly employs a literature analysis approach to make its argument. The article closely aligns with the theoretical elucidations of Chinese civilization, Chinese culture, and the Chinese Nation by Chinese scholars. From the perspectives of the relationship between Chinese civilization and global civilizations, the relationship between the Chinese path to modernization and the modern civilization of the Chinese Nation, and the internal holistic and localized relationships within Chinese culture, it substantiates the guiding principles for the construction of modern civilization of the Chinese Nation. These principles entail maintaining the subjectivity of Chinese culture and Chinese civilization, accurately discerning the contemporaneity of modern civilization construction in China, and upholding the trunk of Chinese culture in relation to ethnic cultures as its branches.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 The subjectivity of Chinese culture and Chinese civilization

The Chinese Nation boasts a civilization spanning over 5000 years³. Prior to modern times, the illustrious Chinese Nation not only engendered a brilliant ancient civilization but also maintained a preeminent global position in culture for a considerable duration. However, “After the Opium War of 1840, China was gradually reduced to a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society and suffered greater ravages than ever before. The country endured intense humiliation, the people were subjected to great pain, and the Chinese civilization was plunged into darkness. (Xi 2021)” Due to China’s lag in international competition in modern times, debates arose regarding whether traditional Chinese culture could continue to serve as the dominant spiritual force propelling the Chinese Nation toward independence and modernization. Whether during the period of the Westernization Movement with debates between “Chinese Learning” and “Western Learning,” or during the New Culture Movement marked by various “ism” debates, it became evident that traditional Chinese culture was at a juncture necessitating thorough transformation.

Under the leadership of the CPC, through the integration of the fundamental principles of Marxism with China’s concrete realities and Chinese excellent traditional culture, the spiritual revitalization of traditional Chinese culture was realized. This reform not only profoundly altered the trajectory of Chinese culture but also profoundly changed the prospects and destiny of the Chinese people and the Chinese Nation, even profoundly altering the trends and patterns of global development. In the speech delivered at the Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the CPC and in the third historical Resolution on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of

³ The Archaeological Ruins of Liangzhu City (about 3300–2300 BCE) were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2019. They have gained worldwide recognition as bearing testimony to the existence of at least 5,000 years of Chinese civilization. See Archaeological Ruins of Liangzhu City - UNESCO World Heritage Centre <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1592>.

the Party over the Past Century, General Secretary Xi Jinping summarized the significant achievements made by the CPC in leading the Chinese people and the Chinese Nation: from 1921 to 1949, the victory of the New Democratic Revolution was achieved, establishing the People's Republic of China, enabling national independence and people's liberation; from 1949 to 1977, socialist revolution was carried out, promoting socialist construction, attaining outstanding achievements in the socialist revolution and construction; from 1978 to 2012, through reform and opening up, the creation, adherence to, defense, and development of socialism with Chinese characteristics, China rapidly caught up with the times, achieving great success in socialist modernization. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, realizing the first centenary goal, clearly outlining the strategic arrangements to achieve the second centenary goal, creating new achievements in socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, and the Chinese Nation has made a great leap from standing up, getting rich to becoming strong, realizing that the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation has entered an irreversible historical process.

From a global perspective, modernization originating from the West in modern times constitutes a comprehensive transformation and even revolution that alters the course of human history. Since then, achieving modernization has become the fundamental logic of human social development and the world historical process, as well as the consistent historical mission and responsibility of the CPC over the past century.

The Chinese path to modernization is a systematic summary of the experience of the CPC's leadership, with Xi Jinping at its core, in modernization practice over the past century. It is also a creative response to important theoretical and practical issues such as "What is the Chinese modernization path, and how to expand the Chinese path to modernization." The Report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC systematically summarizes the five basic characteristics of the Chinese path to modernization: Chinese modernization is modernization with a huge population scale, modernization for common prosperity for all the people, modernization with coordinated material and spiritual civilizations, modernization characterized by harmonious coexistence between man and nature, and modernization based on the path of peaceful development. Chinese modernization not only adheres to the general laws of modernization and meets universal standards of modernization but also adheres to the basic principles and development directions of scientific socialism, embodying the socialist nature of Chinese modernization path. The reason why the descendants of the Chinese Nation have been able to reverse China's historical fate since modern times and achieve today's great achievements lies fundamentally in adhering to the leadership of the CPC. Only by understanding and grasping the fundamental requirement of adhering to the leadership of the CPC for Chinese modernization can we fully understand the five dimensions and profound connotations of Chinese modernization, fully understand how Chinese modernization breaks out of the Western framework of modernization models and achieves transcendence of the Western modernization model, and enhance the confidence and determination to comprehensively promote the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation through Chinese modernization.

Under the guidance of the CPC, the successful completion of the New Democratic Revolution, the socialist revolution and construction, the reform and opening-up, and the endeavor toward socialism with Chinese characteristics have significantly elevated the pride of the Chinese people and the Chinese Nation. This success has not only dispelled the doubts surrounding the modernization of Chinese culture but has also reinforced the nation's confidence in its cultural heritage. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has articulated the concept of "confidence in culture" on the foundation of "confidence in our theory, system and path." In the report to the 20th National Congress, General Secretary Xi further elucidated cultural confidence: "We have established and upheld a foundational system for ensuring the guiding role of Marxism in the ideological domain. The Party's new theory for the new era has been embraced by the people, the core socialist values are resonating with the public, fine traditional Chinese culture is undergoing creative transformation and development, cultural programs are flourishing, and the online environment has seen continuous improvement. All this has brought overarching and fundamental changes in China's ideological landscape... There is a notably stronger sense of cultural confidence and a higher level of morale throughout the Party and the nation. (Xi 2022)" This indicates that, in the ongoing process of modernization and development, Chinese excellent traditional culture has kept pace with the times through creative transformation and innovation, further demonstrating the subjectivity of Chinese culture.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has raised cultural confidence to the level of an indicator of the Party's ability to uphold and advance Marxism. He stressed, "To uphold and develop Marxism, we must integrate it with China's fine traditional culture. Only by taking root in the rich historical and cultural soil of the country and the nation can the truth of Marxism flourish here." "We must stay confident in our history and culture, make the past serve the present, and develop the new from the old. We must integrate the essence of Marxism with the best of fine traditional Chinese culture and with the common values that our people intuitively apply in their everyday lives. We should keep endowing Marxist theory with distinctive Chinese features and consolidating the historical basis and public support for adapting Marxism to the Chinese context and the needs of our times. With this, we will ensure that Marxism puts down deep roots in China" (Xi 2022). This is a political and ideological exposition of the value of the subjectivity of Chinese culture and a spiritual force to promote Chinese modernization.

A comprehensive study of the 20th National Congress of the CPC's discourse on cultural confidence and self-improvement not only addresses issues related to how to view traditional culture but also how to perceive the relationship between Chinese culture and cultures of other countries and China's position in the global cultural landscape. Regarding the issue of traditional culture, due to China's decline and stagnation in modern times, there have long been trends in the intellectual and cultural circles to reflect on or even negate the value of traditional culture. In the 100 years since the May Fourth Movement, there have been diverse attitudes toward traditional culture in various sectors of society. The CPC, using Marxist dialectical materialism to view Chinese traditional culture, insists on creatively transforming and innovatively developing traditional culture with an attitude of "absorbing

essence and discarding dross.” With the advent of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, the CPC, on the basis of upholding “confidence in our path, in our theory, and in our system,” has further proposed to uphold “cultural confidence,” transforming the “Three Confidences” into “Four Confidences.” This fully demonstrates that cultural confidence has been incorporated into the mainstream ideological system of China, becoming a spiritual force for the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation. In interpreting the gist of the Report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC, Li Shulei believes that the rejuvenation of a nation requires not only strong material forces but also strong spiritual forces. The realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation requires the prosperity and flourishing of Chinese culture, the comprehensive construction of a socialist modernized country necessarily requires the construction of socialist cultural power, the ever-growing need of the people for a better life necessarily requires the continuous satisfaction of their spiritual and cultural needs, and promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind necessarily requires the continuous enhancement of the influence of Chinese culture (Guidebook for the Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China 2022).

Under the leadership of the CPC, the Chinese Nation has undergone a century of arduous struggles from standing up and becoming prosperous to becoming strong, enhancing the confidence of the entire Chinese Nation, including cultural confidence. However, under the vigorous suppression and containment of the West, our passive situation in international public opinion has not fundamentally changed. We are still criticized or even “encircled” in international public opinion. The persistent challenge remains that China’s voice struggles to resonate widely or exert significant influence on the global stage. The issue of how Chinese culture can maintain its subjectivity in the face of Western culture, which still dominates, has become a major challenge we face. In essence, whether it is the cultural introspection proposed by Fei Xiaotong at the turn of the 20th century, or the contemporary emphasis on cultural confidence and cultural construction, these endeavors underscore the intrinsic subjectivity of Chinese culture. This subjectivity is not merely anchored in the millennia-old continuity of Chinese civilization but also in China’s steadfast commitment to an independent development path with Chinese characteristics since modern times. Guided by the leadership of the CPC, in the process of “two combinations,” China has forged a socialist path and a trajectory toward modernization that not only aligns with global modernization trends but also exhibits unique Chinese characteristics. This strategic course is predicated on the deliberate selection of China’s national circumstances, particularly the five distinct traits of Chinese culture, showcasing the inherent subjectivity of Chinese culture passed down through generations.

3.2 The contemporaneity of modern civilization construction of the Chinese Nation

At the 20th National Congress of the CPC, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that the central task of the CPC will be “to advance the rejuvenation of the Chinese

Nation on all fronts through a Chinese path to modernization”. Advancing the Chinese path to modernization must adhere to the “Four Confidences,” especially “cultural confidence.” We should firmly believe the fact that the Chinese civilization, which has never been interrupted in over 5000 years of history, has not only always been an important culture with subjectivity in the world cultural system, but also has not been overcome by the powerful Western culture and civilization during the process of China’s economic and social decline in modern times. On the contrary, the Chinese Nation and the Chinese people, after enduring hardships, have consistently adhered to the stance and tradition of Chinese culture while absorbing and learning from foreign cultures. Under the leadership of the CPC, the stance and tradition of Chinese culture have once again become vibrant, serving not only as the spiritual pillar supporting China’s rise to prosperity and strength but also as the spiritual force driving the continued advancement of Chinese path to modernization and the construction of a new form of human civilization. As the Chinese path to modernization continues to develop and China’s comprehensive national strength further increases, the appeal, reach, and influence of Chinese culture will further enhance, and the subjectivity of Chinese culture will be further demonstrated.

Chinese path to modernization must adhere to the stance of Chinese culture, persist in taking the road of socialist modernization with Chinese characteristics, and simultaneously promote the innovative development of culture, creating a new socialist culture that is compatible with the path of Chinese modernization. Affirming the value of Chinese excellent traditional culture is the foundation for us to stand firm in the swirling world of cultures, but it is not the entirety, nor is it decisive. We must also adhere to the principle of “not forgetting our roots, absorbing from outside, looking to the future, transforming in inheritance, surpassing in learning, and continuously promoting cultural innovation and creation,” and “forge a new brilliance of socialist culture in the construction of a culturally strong nation” (Guidebook for the Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China 2022). The Report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC put forward five specific tasks: firstly, developing a socialist ideology that has the power to unite and inspire the people; secondly, extensively applying the core socialist values; thirdly, enhancing civility throughout society; fourthly, developing cultural programs and the cultural sector; and fifthly, extending the reach and appeal of Chinese civilization.

General Secretary Xi Jinping’s exposition on the continuity, innovation, unity, inclusiveness, and peacefulness of Chinese civilization reveals the direction of contemporary Chinese cultural construction. A significant task in the current theoretical field is to comprehensively expound the theoretical value and modern significance of the five prominent characteristics of Chinese civilization. These five characteristics fully embody the spiritual essence and quintessence of Chinese excellent traditional culture. They are not only models for interpreting the significant theoretical achievements of Chinese civilization through the adherence to the “two combinations”, but also hold practical significance for advancing the high-quality development of the Party’s ethnic work in the new era, with the consolidation of the sense of community for the Chinese Nation as the main thread, and promoting the construction of the Chinese Nation’s community and the modernization of Chinese national civilization.

“Chinese civilization has outstanding continuity, which fundamentally determines that the Chinese Nation will inevitably follow its own path. Without understanding China from the perspective of its long and continuous history, it is impossible to comprehend ancient China, understand modern China, and even less so to understand future China” (Xi 2023a). In the more than 5000 years of civilization history, the Chinese people have created a brilliant Chinese civilization and made significant contributions to human progress. The characters created by our ancestors thousands of years ago are still in use today, and the Chinese characters we use today are fundamentally no different from oracle bone inscriptions. Although the term “China” has different connotations in ancient and modern times, no one can deny that Chinese civilization is the only great civilization in the world that has continuously developed in state forms to this day. Today’s China is a natural continuation of historical China, it is the China of all Chinese people, and it is also the common homeland of the Chinese Nation for survival and development. Strengthening the sense of community for the Chinese Nation requires all ethnic groups to continue to carry forward the great patriotic spirit of “loving China,” unite and strive together, embark on the road of socialist modernization, and devote themselves to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation.

Building the modern civilization of the Chinese Nation requires inheriting the Chinese excellent traditional culture, but it also requires the creative transformation and innovative development of the Chinese excellent traditional culture. This is a new requirement for the innovation of Chinese civilization in the new era. “Chinese civilization has outstanding innovation, which fundamentally determines that the Chinese Nation has an enterprising spirit of adherence to the original while not sticking to the old, respecting the ancient while not copying the past, and determines that the Chinese Nation is not afraid of new challenges and has the courage to accept new things” (Xi 2023a) Strengthening the sense of community for the Chinese Nation emphasizes not only the common maintenance and continuation of the continuity of Chinese civilization by all ethnic groups but also requires all ethnic groups to carry forward the spiritual wealth of “keeping pace with the times and forging ahead,” face new challenges and difficulties without getting discouraged or compromising, have the courage and ability to carry on our fight, and constantly innovate and create, opening up new development space in innovative practice.

Forging strong sense of community for Chinese Nation is the concentrated embodiment of the fundamental pursuit of the unity of Chinese civilization in the new era, opening up a new realm for all ethnic groups to jointly maintain the unity of the motherland and promote the great unity of the Chinese Nation. “Chinese civilization has outstanding unity, which fundamentally determines that the various ethnic cultures of the Chinese Nation are integrated into one, even in the face of major setbacks, they are firmly united; determines that the territory cannot be divided, the state cannot be chaotic, the nation cannot be scattered, and civilization cannot be broken; determines that national unity is always the core interest of China; and determines that a strong and unified country is the destiny of all ethnic peoples” (Xi 2023a). Forging strong sense of community for Chinese Nation is the embodiment of the “Great Unity Thought” in Chinese excellent traditional culture in the modern era of nation-states, emphasizing the consistency of national identity among all

ethnic groups, so as for all ethnic groups to form ideological, theoretical, psychological, and emotional identification that maintains national unity and unites to achieve common prosperity and development. The unity of Chinese civilization fundamentally determines that the Chinese Nation is a big family united by the convergence of the “Four Sharing⁴” community concept, which determines that Chinese culture, which has epitomized various ethnic cultures, is the root, trunk and vein of continuing Chinese civilization. It also determines the importance of national unity and the inevitability of all ethnic groups jointly maintaining a strong and unified country. Chinese culture endows Chinese civilization with super strong cohesion, inherits the tradition of “Great Unity” that Chinese people have respected since ancient times, and becomes an important manifestation of the historical trend of “internal cohesion and the unified multi-ethnicity” of the Chinese Nation.

The inclusiveness of Chinese Civilization nurtures the open-mindedness and symbiotic concept of the Chinese Nation to accommodate all components, absorb various elements, coexist harmoniously, and lay a solid foundation for the construction of the modern civilization of the Chinese Nation. “Chinese civilization has outstanding inclusiveness, fundamentally determining the historical orientation of exchanges, communications, and integration of the Chinese Nation, determining the harmonious pattern of coexistence of various religious beliefs in China, and determining the open-mindedness of Chinese culture to absorb and integrate with world civilizations” (Xi 2023a). Forging strong sense of community for Chinese Nation advocates that all ethnic groups firmly establish the community concept of “Four Sharing”, which is the embodiment of the mainstream trend of ethnic solidarity, harmony, and common development of the Chinese Nation in the new era. Chinese culture emphasizes “harmony in diversity.” In the process of exchanges, communications, and integration over thousands of years, various ethnic groups have converged into the unified Chinese Nation, ultimately constructing a Chinese Nation community where you cannot be separated from me, and I cannot be separated from you, with interconnected bloodlines and shared destiny. At the same time, inclusiveness also determines the Chinese Nation’s open and inclusive attitude towards different religions while adhering to the governance principle of “political primacy, religious subsidiarity, and harmony in plurality,” ensuring that various religions are included in the framework of Chinese culture, coexist mutually, and live in harmony. When dealing with foreign cultures, inclusiveness determines the broad-mindedness of the Chinese Nation to embrace diverse influences and accept advanced cultures, especially from other countries. The Chinese Nation cherishes peaceful coexistence (万物并育)⁵, dialectical unity, and the harmonious integration of diverse elements.

The peacefulness of Chinese civilization highlights the concept of a Community of Shared Future for Mankind, namely “harmony among all nations, the world is a

⁴ It means people from all ethnic groups in China are in the same community, where they share weal and woe, share the same future, share stick together through thick and thin, and share life and death.

⁵ 万物并育 (Wan Wu Bing Yu), derived from *the Book of Rites* (Li Ji, 礼记), an important collection of ancient Chinese regulations and systems. The meaning of the expression is that all living things in the world can grow and develop side by side without harming each other, which emphasizes the importance of harmony, coexistence, and unity.

family,” serving as a spiritual force leading world peace. “Chinese civilization has outstanding peacefulness, fundamentally determining that China has always been a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development, a maintainer of international order, persistently pursuing cultural exchanges and mutual learning without seeking cultural hegemony, not imposing its values and political system on others, insisting on cooperation rather than confrontation, and never forming exclusive cliques” (Xi 2023a). Strengthening the sense of community for the Chinese Nation emphasizes the great unity of the Chinese Nation and its descendants, not advocating “Greater Chinaism” or “Pan-Chineseism,” but embodying the pursuit of peaceful cultural genes. For thousands of years, as a vast country with a large population and abundant resources, China has advocated reciprocity and harmony, never seeking expansion or colonization, nor pursuing hegemony. The historical tradition and cultural genes of pursuing peace are also the fundamental reason why various ethnic groups on the Chinese land have ultimately coalesced into the Chinese Nation because this culture brings together various ethnic groups into a “big family”, and this “big family” has a tradition of resolving ethnic conflicts and inward cohesion. This is the tradition of learning from each other’s strengths and weaknesses, and helping each other. With the establishment of socialist ethnic relations, we have further developed these historical cultural traditions into the basic principles of “equality, unity, mutual assistance, and harmony.” This is fundamentally different from the path of ethnic nationalism of nation-states in the West, which ultimately resort to their nationalism to resolve ethnic conflicts and establish “one nation, one state.” “In pursuing modernization, China will not tread the old path of war, colonization, and plunder taken by some countries. That brutal and blood-stained path of enrichment at the expense of others caused great suffering for the people of developing countries. We will stand firmly on the right side of history and on the side of human progress. Dedicated to peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit, we will strive to safeguard world peace and development as we pursue our own development, and we will make greater contributions to world peace and development through our own development” (Xi 2022). This is the new logic of the Chinese path to modernization proposed by Xi Jinping at the 20th National Congress of the CPC and also the new positioning of Chinese culture in the world cultural system. Just as the Chinese path to modernization leads to a new form of human civilization, China must adhere to the subjectivity of Chinese culture in the world cultural system, and enhance the international reach and appeal of Chinese culture, but this enhancement of reach and appeal is not like the “universal values” advocated by the dominant Western cultural system, which requires or even forces other countries to accept. On the contrary, Chinese culture emphasizes “treating others as one would like to be treated,” and emphasizes exerting influence through its own words, deeds, etiquette, morality, and cultural cultivation, silently playing a role in creating a new form of human civilization and developing a human community with a shared future. China advocates for a shared value system for all mankind through consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits, rather than the law of the jungle and the so-called “universal values” of might is right and survival of the fittest. It is precisely at this point that the subjectivity of Chinese culture further enhances its global values and core characteristics in world culture. Upholding the subjectivity of Chinese culture

and constructing the modern civilization of the Chinese Nation provide Chinese wisdom for building a new form of human civilization and promoting the construction of a human community with a shared future.

These invaluable historical and cultural characteristics determine that Chinese civilization can thrive continuously, inherit to this day, and have a bright future. Forging strong sense of community for Chinese Nation is not only aimed at ethnic work but also serves the major decision-making and deployment of the overall strategy for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation. This integrates the Marxist theory of ethnicity with China's specific practice of ethnic work and combines it with Chinese excellent traditional culture, which is the essence of the chapter on ethnicity of *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era* (Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee 2023).

Building the modern civilization of the Chinese Nation must vigorously strengthen the construction of cultural power in the new era, which means building an advanced culture with characteristics of the times, leading the trend of the times, and reflecting the direction of cultural construction in China and even globally, embodying the contemporaneity of culture and civilization. Upholding the subjectivity of Chinese culture does not mean clinging to the past or equating Chinese culture solely with traditional Chinese culture. Because any culture is a product of its time and must be modernized, constantly developing through creation and innovation. Even content regarded as excellent traditional culture requires innovation and creation in inheritance. This inheritance is not simply copying, but must make the main content of culture consistent with the spirit of the times and the requirements of the times. Just as Chinese Communists have always insisted on sinicizing and modernizing Marxism, traditional culture also needs to undergo creative transformation and innovative development, taking this "dual creation" as the basic principle and fundamental path for constructing contemporary Chinese culture. Contemporary Chinese culture integrates Chinese excellent traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture into one, representing the culmination of various ethnic excellent cultures. The excellent traditional cultures of various ethnic groups formed and developed over the long history are the soil and foundation for constructing contemporary Chinese culture. However, traditional culture is not all essential; some may even be undesirable. Some cultural content may have been appropriate at the time, but over the course of historical development, it may need to change because it cannot keep up with the pace of the times or meet the needs of the people. In fact, any culture must undergo organic renewal and innovation as society progresses. This process of renewal is also a process of refinement, sublation and development.

3.3 The arterial and leading attributes of Chinese culture in relation to any local ethnic culture

The pluralistic unity of the Chinese Nation and its 56 ethnic groups underscores the pivotal importance of appropriately managing the relationship between Chinese

culture and the cultures of diverse ethnic groups, constituting a crucial aspect of China's ethnic work.

General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasizes, “The excellent traditional cultures of all ethnic groups are integral components of Chinese culture. Chinese culture is like the trunk of a tree, while individual ethnic cultures are branches and leaves; only when the roots are deep and the trunk is strong can the branches and leaves grow well” (Xinhua News Agency 2021). This perspective, rooted in Marxist dialectical materialism, profoundly elucidates the relationship between Chinese culture and the cultures of various ethnic groups, bearing significant guidance for safeguarding and inheriting the outstanding traditional cultures of all ethnic groups, enriching the connotations and denotations of Chinese culture, and constructing a shared spiritual homeland for the Chinese Nation.

During the deliberations of the Inner Mongolia delegation at the Fifth Session of the 13th National People's Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping further emphasized,

“The requirements for consolidating the sense of community for the Chinese Nation should be implemented in various aspects such as historical and cultural promotion and education, the construction of public cultural facilities, the construction of iconic urban buildings, and the exhibition of tourist landscapes. It is necessary to correctly handle the relationship between Chinese culture and the culture of the local ethnic groups, thereby consolidating the ideological and cultural foundation for consolidating the sense of community for the Chinese Nation” (Xinhua News Agency 2022).

These discourses provide essential guidance for correctly managing the relationship between Chinese culture and the cultures of various ethnic groups.

The connotations and denotations of Chinese culture differ from those of the cultures of various ethnic groups. Chinese culture, as a shared culture among various ethnic groups with a broader scope, and greater guiding function, encompasses political culture, ideology, values, and legal norms, tightly integrated with the national political power, transcending the realms of various ethnic cultures. It has become a national culture embodying the spiritual essence of the entire Chinese Nation, guiding and regulating the development directions of various ethnic cultures. Hence, the absorption and integration of the cultures of various ethnic groups into Chinese culture entail connotations and denotations distinct from those of the cultures of various ethnic groups.

The relationship between Chinese culture and the cultures of various ethnic groups varies. Fei Xiaotong distinguishes the relationship between various ethnic groups and the Chinese Nation as one of lower and higher tiers, further subdividing the lower tier into multiple levels. Consequently, the relationship between the cultures of various ethnic groups and Chinese culture also embodies lower and higher tiers, with the cultures of various ethnic groups further divisible into multiple levels.

The relationship between Chinese culture and the cultures of various ethnic groups can also be understood as the relationship between the whole and its parts. Chinese culture often encompasses the entire territory of China, intertwining with the mainstream values and culture advocated by the national regime, constituting an

overall national culture. The totality is greater than the sum of its parts, so Chinese culture as a totality, deserves much attention in the construction of the modern civilization of the Chinese Nation. In contrast, the cultures of various ethnic groups pertain to local or regional cultures, constituting localized cultures subordinate to the national and overall culture. In this sense, the pluralistic unity of the Chinese Nation is also reflected in the pluralistic unity characteristics of Chinese culture. As local cultures, the cultures of various ethnic groups are integral components of Chinese culture. They enjoy the inclusiveness, diversity and novelty of culture brought about by Chinese culture. On the other hand, they are regulated and restricted by Chinese culture.

The formation of Chinese culture and the cultures of various ethnic groups differ in mechanisms and scopes. As essential components of Chinese culture, the roots of the cultures of various ethnic groups stem from their respective statuses as integral components of the Chinese Nation. During the formative phase of the Chinese Nation, the cultures of various ethnic groups intermingled and developed, providing inexhaustible impetus for the formation and development of Chinese culture. Fei Xiaotong points out, "In the course of the development of Chinese culture, diverse cultural forms mutually influence, absorb, and merge with each other, jointly forming the traditional culture of the Chinese Nation, characterized by 'harmony in diversity'" (Fei 1999). Throughout Chinese history, various ethnic groups adapted to the natural environments of their primary habitation areas, forming a set of ethnic cultures tailored to their specific production and livelihood practices. The cultures of diverse ethnic groups have evolved comprehensive cultural frameworks to address various aspects of human interaction, including relations with nature, interpersonal dynamics, and societal norms. These frameworks encompass elements such as beliefs, attire, culinary traditions, language and script, architectural styles, aesthetic motifs, and more. They not only mirror the respective productive capacities and production relations of each ethnic group but also represent outcomes of cross-cultural learning and assimilation. The interactions, exchanges, and blending of various ethnic groups jointly propel the continuous development and prosperity of various ethnic cultures. In this process, Chinese culture, as the epitome of the outstanding traditional cultures of various ethnic groups, plays a leading role in the development and prosperity of various ethnic cultures, promoting deepening exchanges and interactions among various ethnic cultures. Concurrently benefiting from sustained exchanges and interactions among various ethnic cultures, the connotations of Chinese culture continue to enrich, with dominant values and other leading elements continuously adapting to the needs of the times, better reflecting the aspirations of the era, and guiding the trends of the times. The numerous common characteristics possessed by Chinese culture as a whole not only provide a common cultural foundation and soil for various ethnic groups but also guide the construction of a shared spiritual homeland for various ethnic groups, embodying the contemporary manifestation of the shared spiritual essence of the Chinese Nation.

4 Conclusion

Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, General Secretary Xi Jinping has attached great importance to cultural confidence and cultural construction. Not only does he integrate cultural construction into the overall framework of socialism with Chinese characteristics, but he also underscores the critical role of cultural confidence and cultural construction in the modernization of China's governance system and governance capacity.

In 2021, during an inspection in Fujian, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized, “We need to promote the creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese excellent traditional culture to activate its vitality with the spirit of the times. We must integrate the adherence to Marxism with the promotion of Chinese excellent traditional culture, and firmly follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics”.⁶

In the same year, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized during his inspection in Yulin, Shaanxi Province, that “we must uphold the guidance of core socialist values, persist in creative transformation and innovative development, identify the connection points between traditional culture and modern life, and continuously meet the growing needs of the people for a better life”.⁷

In the Report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC, General Secretary Xi stated,

“To build a modern socialist country in all respects, we must develop a socialist culture with Chinese characteristics and be more confident in our culture. In our efforts to turn China into a country with a strong socialist culture, we will focus on upholding socialism with Chinese characteristics, rallying public support, fostering a new generation of young people, developing Chinese culture, and better presenting China to the world. We will develop a sound, people-oriented socialist culture for our nation that embraces modernization, the world, and the future. We will ignite the cultural creativity of the entire nation and build a powerful source of inspiration for realizing national rejuvenation” (Xi 2022).

“We should uphold the foundational system for ensuring the guiding role of Marxism in the ideological domain. We will ensure that culture serves the people and serves socialism. We will follow the principle of letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend, and we will encourage creative transformation and innovative development of traditional Chinese culture. Guided by the core socialist values, we will develop advanced socialist

⁶ Demonstrating Greater Achievements in Serving and Integrating into the New Development Pattern, and Striving to Compose a Chapter of Building a Socialist Modernized Country in Fujian (In Chinese: 在服务和融入新发展格局上展现更大作为 奋力谱写全面建设社会主义现代化国家福建篇章). 2021. *People's Daily*. March 26.

⁷ See Liberate Thinking, Reform and Innovate, Continue to Work Hard to Compose a New Chapter of High-Quality Development in Shaanxi 2021. In Chinese: 解放思想改革创新 再接再厉谱写陕西高质量发展新篇章. *People's Daily*. September 16.

culture, promote revolutionary culture, and carry forward fine traditional Chinese culture. In doing so, we will be well-placed to meet people's ever-growing intellectual and cultural needs, consolidate a common intellectual foundation for the whole Party and all Chinese people to strive in unity, and continuously grow China's cultural soft power and the appeal of Chinese culture" (Xi 2022).

These important statements serve as theoretical guidelines and action plans for promoting the construction of a culturally strong nation in the new era, embodying the adherence to the subjectivity of Chinese culture in the world cultural system and holding profound significance for promoting the cultural confidence and strength of the Chinese Nation and forging a new glory of socialist culture.

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Comments

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