

Chinese Cultural Security in the Information Communication Era

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This paper addresses the subject of cultural security which has increasingly come into focus in China in recent years with greater attention being accorded to such by the government. It is argued here that in the information communication era there are both threats and opportunities to Chinese culture. The author assesses what China is doing to both counter and harness these before outlining some recommendations on how Chinese cultural security policy can further be bolstered going into the future.

Often overlooked in favor of other more traditional aspects of security, such as military and energy security, cultural security is also an important component of a nation's security. At present, China's cultural security is confronted with an array of challenges resulting from globalization, Western cultural hegemony, cultural separatism, and in particular the globalization of information. The issue of cultural security has therefore grown greatly in importance in the information communication era. Accordingly, addressing concerns over cultural security, as a facet of national security, has increasingly come into focus in China in recent years. After defining cultural security and its importance, this paper examines the threats to—but also opportunities for—Chinese national cultural security, before outlining the policies that China is adopting to manage these issues. The paper concludes with some recommendations on how Chinese cultural security policy can be further bolstered going into the future.

Culture is a cornerstone of the formation and development of a country. It embodies a country's conventional wisdom and civilization, and a country that has secured its culture will be better able to build and manage its national cultural system as well as to maintain the integrity and self-recognition of its ethnic culture.¹ There are four main aspects of national cultural security: security of language, customs and manners, values, and lifestyle. Language is the most fundamental and durable component of civilization. Once a country loses its linguistic independence, national culture finds itself completely subverted. Second, the customs and manners of a nation are formed over a long process of historical development, constituting a common

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pattern of behavior that people are expected to emulate. They carry the cultural memories of a nation and thus become an important part of a nation's culture. Third, values are intrinsic and profound aspects of culture. Values security refers to the attitude taken by the majority of citizens toward traditional and modern values. Fourth, life-style security refers to the patterns of daily life within a specific culture, from the clothes people wear to the food they eat. All these aspects taken together form the foundation of a nation's cultural security. It follows that safeguarding national cultural security contributes to creating a strong nation and can also be a powerful tool for the projection of soft power. However, at the same time, culture is subject to many threats and influences. The occupation of Taiwan by Japan in 1895, whereby Taiwanese were forced to learn Japanese and were prohibited from using Chinese, is a historical example of the direct imposition of a foreign culture. More recently, the information communication era has heralded new ways in which national cultures can be undermined as well as—more positively—opened up to new influences.

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Culture and the Internet Era

In the information communication era, a global network has been created which transcends national boundaries and breaks down cultural barriers. In the so-called network nation, people from different regions can not only receive, disseminate, and share explosive information at any time, but also can build virtual network communities to express their own special ideas and participate in social activities. This all serves to blur the geographical distinctions between countries and eliminates the cultural borders of countries, resulting in a new generation of “netizens” at risk of losing their sense of belonging and collective identity.

Faced with the globalization of information, the cultural sovereignty of many countries, and especially of developing countries such as China, has been chal-

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lenged greatly by its negative aspects. But on the other hand, information globalization also provides new opportunities for countries to enhance their national cultural security. Facing both risks and opportunities, countries must fully understand their own strengths and weaknesses in order to safeguard their national cultures.

Threats to China's Cultural Security

China is still relatively weak in terms of promoting its culture, although efforts to do so have been stepped up in recent years. Furthermore, its language, national values, traditional customs, and lifestyle—all components of what constitutes a culture—are facing great challenges and threats.

Toward the end of 2010, the China Youth Daily Social Investigation Center conducted a survey of over 3,000 people in which 80.8 percent of respondents said that China was facing a crisis of culture.² Indeed, the fracture between contemporary Chinese people and traditional culture is already obvious and, if the trend continues, it may endanger people's cultural identity

and even national identity. The nature of some of these threats is elaborated on below.

The impact of the dominance of English on other languages is abundantly clear. It is calculated that 75 percent of all TV programs are made in the English

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language; that more than 90 percent of all information online is in English; and almost 100 percent of software source code is written in English. While English is the lingua franca of international communication, Mandarin Chinese is in fact the

world’s most spoken language by number of native speakers. In the face of English-language dominance, it is therefore important to preserve and promote the importance of Chinese.

With regard to values, Western values have had a significant impact on Chinese traditional values—whether through films, media, literature, or other publications. While not directly imposed per se, the result is nevertheless the “grafting of Western values” gradually onto Chinese traditional values. Hollywood productions are one example in which traditional Chinese stories are Americanized and thus lose their original spirit and message. The movies *Mulan* and *Kung Fu Panda* are both examples: *Mulan* is a traditional Chinese heroine with traditional Chinese virtues, but in the Hollywood movie adaptation she is depicted as a Western heroine pursuing ideals of love and freedom with an adventurous spirit. There is a danger that importing such “distorted” adaptations may lead to an acceptance of Western culture among the younger generation of Chinese and so undermine the traditional values which form an important part of national cultural security.

Furthermore, traditional customs, including traditional festivals, are an important carrier of the Chinese spirit and sentiments. However, these are currently facing challenges of globalization and modernization. Additionally, foreign powers have had a significant impact on traditional customs. For example, during the 2004 Dragon Boat Festival, a traditional holiday and event that has been held annually in China for over

2000 years, it emerged that South Korea had applied to register the Dragon Boat Festival with UNESCO as part of its own intangible cultural heritage before China had done so.³ In the end, South Korea claimed that they had only applied to register the “Jiangling Duanwu Sacrifice” not the Dragon Boat Festival itself, and proposed to enter into a negotiation with China regarding applications for recognition of intangible cultural heritage. However, in October 2005, a Korean company registered the domain “Dragon Boat Festival.cn”⁴ with the result that the traditional cultural brand’s online presence had been captured by South Korea.

These examples represent just a few ways in which Chinese culture is subject to external influences and threats. However, this is not to say that it does not also bring with it opportunities, as is examined below.

Emerging Opportunities

In recent decades the world has witnessed breakthroughs in the development of information technology, with the result that networks have spread rapidly. This has led to social changes in most societies and reshaped the global competitive landscape. In this paper it is argued that under such a scenario opportunities have also emerged.

There are now expanded opportunities for cultural activities with the Chinese cultural industry generally benefiting as a result. The rapid development of information technology has enhanced the international competitiveness of our cultural products, which can be transmitted around the world. As part of this, informed opinion and scientific theory as well as cultural masterpieces can be disseminated to reach large numbers of people, both educating people about China and inspiring them. Moreover, there are now more opportunities for international cultural communication to reach China and ordinary Chinese people, primarily through the Internet, as long as the proper arrangements are made regarding its usage. As part of this, increased knowledge of English will help China to partake and compete in the global economy.

Having outlined the threats and also opportunities, the following section examines some of the steps that have been taken by China to safeguard and promote its culture, as well as considers some of the existing shortcomings in its cultural policies.

Safeguarding Chinese Cultural Security

Increasing importance has been accorded to China's national cultural security in the global information era, with the central government—including the top leadership—paying greater attention to the issue. On August 19, 2013, President Xi Jinping made a speech on the importance of ideology and propaganda work in which he said: "One of the most important parts of propaganda work under a fully opened environment is guiding people to a more comprehensive and objective understanding of China and the outside world. Chinese traditional culture, with its heritage of deep spiritual pursuits, stretching back over a long history is a key advantage ... and we need to be good story-tellers and translators in expressing China."⁵ Moreover, in the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, held in Beijing in November 2013, the Chinese government paid greater attention to cultural development in China by stating the need "to improve the cultural management system, establish and improve the modern cultural market system, and build a modern public cultural service system."⁶ Having understood and underscored the importance of safeguarding national culture in the face of both internal and external factors, there have been significant efforts expended by the Chinese government to do so.

The main threat with which we are faced is that from powerful outside cultures. By highlighting its outstanding traditional culture and improving the status of Chinese as a more powerful language and building an open cultural system, China is responding actively to those threats and challenges as well as promoting Chinese culture to the world. Indeed, in recent years, the Chinese government has greatly cultivated and highlighted the national spirit by striving to build a common spiritual home for the Chinese nation, further improving the status of Chinese and standardizing the use of the Chinese language, including paying greater attention to the Chinese language in schools. At the same time, China has also established an open cultural system that takes into account the practical development needs of Chinese culture: that is, absorbing those aspects of foreign cultures beneficial for China's own cultural development while resisting more corruptive and decadent influences. Being more accommodative and innovative by incorporating contemporary values as part of its mainstream culture, however, will only

serve to strengthen China's cultural development.

China is also deepening the reform of its cultural system. Several measures have been taken by the Chinese government in recent years, including changing the function of cultural management and accelerating the reform of the cultural management system. Continuous improvements are

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being made in public cultural policies, the construction of public cultural infrastructure, and the public cultural service system. The vitality of micro-cultural bodies is being enhanced, for-profit cultural units of enterprises are growing, and the steady reform of non-profit cultural institutions is being promoted.

As a result of the above, considerable progress has been achieved in developing cultural infrastructure, which now has a preliminary level of national coverage and a highly developed public cultural service system in urban areas. More than 5,500 public libraries, 5,000 cultural centers, and 4,600 museums had been built by the end of 2012. A notable example of financial support came on March 10, 2010, when the PRC Ministry of Culture and the China Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) signed an agreement on strategic cooperation to support cultural industry development.⁷ Under the agreement, ICBC actively provides comprehensive financial innovative products and services to outstanding companies in the cultural industry. In order to support building key cultural enterprises, furthermore, ICBC will provide loans and other products and services to promote cultural mergers and acquisitions and cultural reform to support building key cultural enterprises. By expanding the preferential tax policy, extending financial support, and reducing the threshold of market access, the prosperity of the cultural industry is thus more effectively guaranteed.

With regard to cultural industries, China has put its focus on the key cultural contents, such as publishing, film and television advertising, digital animation, exhibition entertainment, and cultural creativity, accelerating the integral development of the culture in-

dustry. An achievement is the emerging increase in the number of cultural products. In 2012, for instance, there were 893 Chinese feature films (constituting a massive increase compared to earlier decades), which generated 17 billion Yuan (\$2.8 billion) in revenues. Additionally, 1,040 TV series (with a total of 33,877 episodes) were produced.⁸ In the context of rapid developments in information technology, China is also focusing on developing the Internet cultural industry and on devising the necessary means to support online cultural products.

Another particular focus has been in respect to literature and the arts: support is being given to performing arts groups so that they continue to produce high-quality works; the management and guidance of literature and the arts industry is being strengthened; and folk and art troupes, both professional and amateur, are receiving support so as to arouse popular enthusiasm for developing social culture.

Through these measures, China's national cultural security has been well attended to and great progress has been made in building the cultural sector. All this is serving to bolster a homegrown organic culture and at the same time promote China's soft power to the world. Notwithstanding, there are also weaknesses and internal challenges faced by China, as examined below.

Weaknesses

There are some inevitable conflicts and disadvantages in the rapid development of the Chinese cultural sector in the new era. Among these, three problems are most significant: cultural market segmentation; obstacles in the reconstruction of cultural institutions; and a lack of clarity regarding intellectual property in the cultural industry.

Because of the lags in the reform of cultural institutions compared with other fields, market segmentation is a very serious problem in a cultural industry that lacks a national market. The first problem is segmentation at the industry level. Macroeconomic regulation, market supervision, industrial policy, and project approval are still operated on a centrally planned basis with the relevant regulatory authorities in the cultural domain imposing restrictive barriers on cultural production—whether radio and TV, newspapers, or publications, and so on. Another problem is regional segmentation. There are many barriers in cultural resources and other

factors that lead to insufficient cultural resource allocation, and as a result the cross-regional activities of market players is limited and the development of a cultural industry negatively influenced.

With the increasing degree of openness of the Chinese cultural market and participation of social capital, a number of non-public cultural enterprises have rapidly developed. However, the state-run cultural institutions have problems in converting to enterprises and have dragged behind in their reforms.

The cultural industry and related cultural products produce both physical goods and intellectual property, which bring economic and social benefits simultaneously. This is of great importance to national cultural management. But this decreases the market competitiveness of cultural institutions and leads to high dominance and inefficient competition. These not only hinder media institutions in developing as independent market players but also have a negative effect on the role of the media in public opinion supervision.

European Experience: Lessons from France

Lessons from other countries in safeguarding their national cultural security—an issue for all countries—may be instructive examples for China to follow. Indeed, promoting a distinct national culture in a globalizing world has become arguably even more important today. It is not possible here to examine all relevant examples. Instead, I will draw upon the experiences of France. Both France and China have a long history and glorious culture, share a basic consensus about the future developments of world culture, and have close cultural exchanges, including “Chinese Culture Year” and “French Culture Year” activities. Therefore, it follows that France's cultural policy may serve as an interesting case from which China can learn.

It is interesting to note that France pursues a policy of “cultural diversity”; this marks a departure from a policy of “cultural exception” in 1993 to “cultural diversity” officially announced by President Jacques Chirac in 2001. This cultural diversity admits cultural pluralism and the significance of the equal development of the cultures of various nationalities. Nevertheless, safeguards are also in place to ensure the status of the French language against the “corroding” influence of English. Accordingly, “French as the official language of France” was written into the constitution and

promulgated as the “Toubon Law” in 1994. The Toubon Law prohibits the usage of foreign languages in announcements, advertisements, radio and television programs, and stipulates that all publications within France must have a French summary, and that French people must speak in French during seminars held in France. Thus language is upheld as one of the foundations of cultural security in France.

France also vigorously promotes French culture, as can be seen in the support given to its film industry. While in some European countries American films account for 80-90 percent of the market, the French government has been unwilling to see a similar situation occur in France. In fact, it is a requirement that from the earnings of every film at the box office a certain amount must be set aside to provide subsidies to the French film industry. In total, the French government spends approximately five billion Francs each year on supporting its culture ranging from literature, art, and music to television and film, among others. The pro-active policies and actions taken by France to safeguard its culture—to mention just a few above—could offer China some important lessons.

Recommendations and Conclusions

This study has shown that in the information communication era, China is still suffering from threats against its national cultural security, and that there still exist some shortcomings in its policies regarding the latter. To resolve these problems, I would like to put forward the following suggestions:

First, China should accelerate the development of its cultural industry and cultural marketplace, put forward clear targets to be met, and formulate detailed and reliable supporting policies.

Second, China should cultivate a number of key cultural enterprises. International competitiveness and the overall strength of the cultural industry depend largely on whether or not we have internationally renowned cultural enterprises.

Third, China should build a modern cultural market system. A rational flow of cultural elements and products is the precondition for the healthy development of a cultural industry. By establishing an efficient market for cultural elements and products, China can effectively promote the prosperity of its cultural industry.

Fourth, China should stimulate and cultivate cultural consumption. Since consumption has a direct pull effect on production, China should innovate the contents and forms of cultural production and services, foster new cultural consumption “hot spots,” and so further improve the cultural consumption enthusiasm of the general public.

Fifth, China should strengthen governmental support. Financial support should be ensured at the government level for reform of cultural systems and development of cultural industries through interest loans, financial aid, as well as subsidies including from both central and local governments.

Finally, China needs to pay more attention to ensure military cultural security. Foreign military culture through war films and TV shows, among other media, are beginning to penetrate China.⁹ Objectively speaking, such military cultural features as strike-first strategies, heroism on the battlefield, and a psychological reliance on weapons do not fit well with Chinese traditional military culture. Therefore, China should make sure that its military is not influenced by foreign military cultural thinking, and that it instead maintains its own Chinese distinctiveness from which it draws its power.

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- ³ UNESCO defines intangible cultural heritage as including “traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.” See website at: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00002>
- ⁴ Editor’s note: the website would seem no longer to exist.
- ⁵ “Xi Jinping: to be good story-tellers and translators in expressing China,” *Xinhua News Net*, August

KEY POINTS

- Several measures have been taken by the Chinese government in recent years to safeguard national cultural security, including changing the function of cultural management and accelerating the reform of the cultural management system.
- Faced with the globalization of information, the cultural sovereignty of many countries, and especially of developing countries such as China, has been challenged greatly by its negative aspects. But on the other hand, information globalization also provides new opportunities for countries to enhance their national cultural security.
- There are now expanded opportunities for cultural activities with the Chinese cultural industry generally benefiting as a result. The rapid development of information technology has enhanced the international competitiveness of our cultural products, which can be transmitted around the world.
- China should accelerate the development of its cultural industry, cultivate a number of key cultural enterprises, build a modern cultural market system, stimulate and cultivate cultural consumption and strengthen governmental support.

⁸ The number of broadcast stations, cable TV users, and digital TV users has increased to 2,520, 25.73 million, and 127.98 million, respectively—thus representing a doubling of figures since the beginning of the reform and opening up era.

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