

Cultural Confidence of Major Powers in “the Belt and Road Initiative” Cultural Diplomacy

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Keywords: The Belt and Road Initiative, cultural diplomacy, cultural confidence of a major nation

Abstract: “The Belt and Road Initiative” has created a vast platform for cooperation and development among nations by fostering cultural exchanges. In the backdrop of deepening globalization, China has been disseminating its exceptional traditional culture globally through cultural interactions under the Belt and Road Initiative. This effort has not only bolstered China’s cultural self-assuredness but has also furnished ideological and cultural underpinning for global harmony and the establishment of a community of shared destiny. In the course of this journey, China’s cultural research has thrived, manifesting cultural self-assurance, and its international influence has been steadily on the rise, significantly advancing the collective development of global cultural diversity.

1. Introduction

On October 18, 2023, president Xi delivered a keynote address at the opening ceremony of the Third Belt and Road Initiative International Cooperation Summit Forum.[1] Within the framework of “the Belt and Road Initiative”, China has been actively strengthening its humanistic exchanges with foreign nations. Cultural diplomacy plays a pivotal role in the broader landscape of national cultural development and stands as a fundamental element in the quest to build a culturally robust nation that exudes unwavering cultural confidence. Since the inception of “the Belt and Road Initiative”, China has achieved remarkable strides in the realm of cultural diplomacy. These advances have provided substantial backing for the global dissemination of Chinese culture and the bolstering of cultural self-assurance. Using “the Belt and Road Initiative” as an illustrative example, a discussion about the role of China’s cultural diplomacy in international cultural exchanges serves to further solidify cultural self-confidence. It also serves as a means to seamlessly integrate China’s cultural diplomacy with international cooperation, thereby propelling global cultural exchanges and cooperation, and ultimately contributing to the shared prosperity and development of all nations.

2. Traditional Chinese Medicine Culture

The culture of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) occupies a prominent and esteemed position

within Chinese culture. Its attributes of simplicity, accessibility, affordability, and efficacy stem from millennia of wisdom cultivated by the Chinese people. TCM has been an enduring and integral component of Chinese society for thousands of years, consistently maintaining a pivotal role in the realms of healthcare, well-being, and cultural traditions.

In the face of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, TCM has extended its reach beyond national borders to combat the outbreak. As early as the end of February 2020, Chinese medicine experts from China, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Spain, the United States, and various other countries provided their services through online platforms, showcasing the distinct appeal of Chinese medicine. This international outreach of TCM serves as compelling evidence that China has adopted a development path that aligns with its unique requirements. In 2020, president Xi once again lauded the remarkable effectiveness of TCM in the prevention and treatment of the COVID-19 outbreak during a symposium with experts and scholars. [2] The pivotal role played by TCM in the prevention and control of the COVID-19 pandemic stands as a significant milestone in the history of TCM's development. It serves as a pertinent and convincing testament that bolsters the professional confidence of TCM students.

In 2022, the State Administration of TCM, in conjunction with the Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Construction of “the Belt and Road Initiative”, issued the “Development Plan for Advancing the High-Quality Integration of Traditional Chinese Medicine into the Belt and Road Initiative (2021-2025)” (referred to as the “Plan” hereafter). [3] This comprehensive plan sets forth a well-defined strategic roadmap and objectives for the international promotion and collaboration involving Chinese medicine.

Chinese medicine culture is deeply entrenched in the annals of Chinese history and embodies a wealth of traditional wisdom amassed over millennia. President Xi has underscored that “the superb traditional Chinese culture, painstakingly crafted and perpetuated by the Chinese nation throughout its long history, forms the very essence and foundation of the Chinese people”[4]. As an integral component of Chinese culture, TCM stands as a symbol of cultural identity. The propagation of TCM culture serves to solidify and enhance this cultural legacy, nurturing a sense of pride among the Chinese populace, while deepening their appreciation and understanding of the traditional principles, beliefs, and values associated with TCM. The culture of TCM mirrors the values, beliefs, and worldviews that define Chinese culture and embodies a holistic approach to health and harmony. With the increasing popularization and global recognition of Chinese medicine in China, numerous universities are now offering Chinese medicine programs to train professionals with an international perspective. Simultaneously, numerous Chinese medicine schools have emerged overseas, providing ample opportunities for deeper study and exchange for those interested in delving into Chinese medicine. These institutions enable individuals from diverse cultures and healthcare systems to explore the facets of Chinese medicine and integrate them into their own practice. Such exchanges promote mutual understanding, respect, and the exchange of knowledge and experiences.

3. Tea Culture

Tea culture, deeply rooted in Chinese heritage, is poised to play a pivotal role in fostering cultural exchanges among countries along the Belt and Road Initiative. With a history dating back millennia, the cultivation and consumption of tea in China are steeped in tradition. Chinese legends and historical records attribute the discovery of tea to Shennong the Great, over 5,000 years ago. Through the ages, tea has been an integral part of Chinese daily life, gracing social gatherings and ceremonies, thus becoming an indelible component of the nation's rich traditional culture. Tea carries profound symbolic significance in Chinese culture, embodying virtues such as purity, serenity, harmony, and enlightenment. It frequently serves as a muse in Chinese poetry, literature,

and art, offering a vehicle to convey philosophical concepts, evoke emotions, and depict the natural world's beauty. Tea is often used as a metaphor for life's journey and the pursuit of inner peace and enlightenment. China's diverse tea culture is renowned, with different regions specializing in various types of tea, reflecting the nation's intricate geographical diversity and rich tapestry of tea traditions.

China boasts the earliest origins of tea culture and ranks among the world's largest producers, with extensive tea plantations and robust sales. In 2022, during the National People's Congress (NPC) held in Beijing, Mr. Chen Shihai, a member of the CPPCC National Committee and Chairman of the Fujian Overseas Chinese Federation, proposed a vigorous campaign to promote tea culture on the global stage.[5] Chinese tea culture is an amalgamation of Confucianism, Taoism, traditional Chinese medicine, and other time-honored traditions. It encapsulates the essence of the Chinese people's dedication to harmonizing with the rhythms of nature, the cultivation of moral character, spiritual enrichment, and the pursuit of equilibrium and unity.[6] With the ongoing implementation of "the Belt and Road initiative", Chinese tea culture has been expanding its influence internationally and has played a pivotal role in disseminating Chinese culture more broadly. In recent years, the nationwide tea industry and tea culture have placed substantial emphasis on the international promotion of tea. Various tea culture activities have been organized, serving as catalysts for the expansion of tea in the global market and facilitating the wider dissemination of tea culture worldwide.

Undoubtedly, tea stands as the most widely consumed beverage in the world today, consistently weaving itself into the fabric of people's daily lives and production processes. Tea culture transcends national borders, serving as a robust cultural symbol with profound and far-reaching influence. The promotion of Chinese tea culture assumes a pivotal role in the preservation and transmission of age-old tea-making techniques, ceremonial traditions, and profound knowledge. The promotion of Chinese tea culture, coupled with the educational endeavors and research initiatives that underpin it, offers scholars, researchers, and ardent tea enthusiasts the unique opportunity to delve deeper into the annals of tea's history, its cultivation, and intricate manufacturing processes. This fosters a more profound understanding and heightened appreciation for the diverse and opulent tapestry of global tea culture. Through the medium of tea culture promotion, the nation consistently deepens its cultural diplomacy, nurturing connections and fostering mutual understanding with nations around the world.

4. Calligraphy Culture

Calligraphy stands as a cornerstone of traditional Chinese culture, revered as one of the most esteemed art forms, deeply entrenched in a history and cultural tradition that spans millennia. With a lineage dating back more than 3,000 years, Chinese calligraphy has evolved in tandem with the development of the Chinese writing system. This exquisite art has been faithfully practiced and passed down through the generations by scholars, artists, and literati of every dynasty, making it an integral part of China's cultural and intellectual heritage. Beyond being a mere art form, Chinese calligraphy has played a pivotal role in communication, documentation, and artistic expression. It serves as both a means of recording words and a tool for the transmission of culture and knowledge. The allure of Chinese calligraphy lies in its capacity to emphasize the inherent beauty of written words, celebrated for its elegance, harmony, balance, and rhythm. Chinese calligraphy serves as a repository for vital cultural values and virtues deeply rooted in Chinese society. It often intertwines with Confucian principles, promoting ideals such as discipline, self-cultivation, humility, and respect. This timeless art form serves as a resplendent ambassador for the nation in the realm of foreign cultural diplomacy.

Calligraphy is an exquisite treasure within China's cultural heritage. On April 9, 2023, as part of the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of "the Belt and Road Initiative", a grand inauguration ceremony was held to mark the commencement of the extensive series of sketching activities titled "Walking Through China". This event was organized by the China Association for the Promotion of Cultural and Artistic Development. Concurrently, it also celebrated the 10th anniversary of "the Belt and Road Initiative", under the banner of "National Calligraphy and Painting Masters Sketching and Writing into Shaanxi".[7] Taking place at the Xi'an Datang West Market Museum, this initiative has a multifaceted purpose. Its primary goals include the propagation of calligraphy culture, the embodiment of the guiding principles outlined in the report of the 20th Party Congress, the advancement and implementation of the "cultural power" strategy, and the facilitation of cultural preservation and international cultural exchanges. These objectives are pursued through the prism of China's distinctive cultural and artistic strengths, aimed at narrating the story of China, fostering the Chinese spirit, upholding Chinese values, and showcasing the might and influence of China on the global stage.

Chinese calligraphy is an art form of unparalleled cultural and historical significance, serving as a conduit for cultural exchange between China and the world. Over centuries, it has held a central place in Chinese history and literature, intimately connected to classical Chinese texts, poetry, and philosophical writings. The promotion of Chinese calligraphy presents an invaluable opportunity for global audiences to delve into the treasures of Chinese literature and attain a deeper appreciation of traditional Chinese culture. Learning calligraphy becomes an educational voyage through which individuals can explore Chinese language, culture, and history, all while engaging with the fascinating world of Chinese characters. Simultaneously, Chinese calligraphy emerges as a potent instrument for projecting cultural soft power in the arena of diplomacy. By advocating for this art form on the international stage, China can enhance its cultural sway and nurture cultural understanding and cooperation with other nations. Calligraphy, thus, serves as a profound bridge for fostering global harmony and enriching cross-cultural exchanges.

Academic cultural diplomacy serves as a catalyst for enhancing a country's cultural soft power and nurturing the cultural confidence of a great nation. In this context, president Xi has emphasized that, within the framework of the new era, the promotion of Asian values founded on principles of peace, cooperation, inclusivity, and integration holds the potential to invigorate regional unity, openness, and progress. This forward-looking approach entails the advancement of a renewed concept of affinity, sincerity, and reciprocity. Its objective is to ensure that China's style of modernization extends its benefits to the neighboring nations, thus jointly propelling the modernization process across Asia. This, in turn, will lead to a mutually reinforcing and complementary relationship between China's high-quality development and the establishment of a harmonious neighborhood environment. Through academic cultural diplomacy, nations can not only share knowledge and expertise but also strengthen their ties and contribute to the prosperity of the wider region.[8]

Academic cultural diplomacy plays a crucial role in bolstering a nation's cultural soft power and cultivating the cultural self-assurance of a major nation. President Xi has emphasized that in the context of this new era, the propagation of Asian values, with peace, cooperation, inclusivity, and integration at its core, will provide fresh impetus for regional cohesion, openness, and advancement. We are committed to propelling a renewed development of the principles of amity, sincerity, and reciprocity, ensuring that China's style of modernization extends greater benefits to its neighboring countries. Together, we will advance the process of modernization in Asia, fostering a symbiotic relationship between China's high-quality development and a favorable regional environment.

The Educational Exchanges in the Belt and Road Initiative stands as a cornerstone of China's academic and cultural diplomacy. It underscores the principles of peace, inclusivity, mutual benefit,

and win-win cooperation, embodying the peaceful nature inherent to Chinese civilization. This core principle underscores China's steadfast commitment as a global peacemaker, a contributor to worldwide development, and a guardian of international order. China's approach is rooted in the pursuit of civilizational exchanges and mutual understanding without the imposition of cultural hegemony, refraining from imposing its values and political system on others. It staunchly adheres to cooperation over confrontation, refusing to engage in divisive practices[9]. China is unwavering in its commitment to cooperation, rejecting the formation of exclusive cliques.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, through academic and cultural diplomacy, China not only showcases its rich cultural heritage and academic achievements but also projects an international image centered on peace, openness, and cooperation. This outreach contributes to bolstering the international community's comprehension and acceptance of China, fostering cross-cultural exchanges and cooperation, and making constructive strides towards the establishment of a more harmonious and prosperous global community, united in the pursuit of a shared human destiny.

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