

Research on the High-quality Development of China's Foreign Cultural Trade in the Context of a Strong Cultural Country

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Abstract: Against the background that the world is experiencing a great change that has not been seen in a hundred years, culture has increasingly become an important source of national cohesion and creativity, and the high-quality development of cultural trade has gradually become an important support for enhancing a country's comprehensive competitiveness and promoting social and economic development. As the government's support for the high-quality development of cultural trade has increased, China's foreign cultural trade has shown a trend of fluctuating growth in trade volume, a rebound in the development of cultural industry, and the rapid development of digital cultural trade. At the same time, in the process of development, there are also problems such as imbalance in the structure of cultural trade, insufficient competitiveness of cultural industries, low level of digital development of cultural enterprises, and lack of high-end talents in cultural trade. This paper puts forward corresponding countermeasure suggestions from optimising the structure of foreign cultural trade, increasing the application and integration of digital technology in cultural and related industries, and improving the efficiency of digital transformation of cultural enterprises.

1. Introduction

Culture is the soul of a country and a nation[1]. The future destiny of the country, the development process of the nation and the interests and well-being of the people are at stake in strengthening cultural self-confidence, enhancing cultural self-awareness and achieving cultural self-reliance[2]. Today, the world is experiencing a great change that has not been seen in a hundred years, and there are more frequent exchanges, blending and exchanges of various cultures around the world. In the face of the complex international environment, realising the leap from a cultural power to a cultural power is a major issue facing contemporary China. Cultural trade is an important content of the construction of a strong cultural country, and its position in the construction of a strong cultural country is becoming more and more prominent, carrying the dual functions of economic growth and cultural dissemination. In recent years, as the development of China's foreign cultural trade has become increasingly effective, the relevant government

departments have attached great importance to the high-quality development of cultural trade. Against the background of the rapid development of digital technology, the introduction and implementation of a series of important policies have provided an important guarantee for the continued growth and structural optimisation of the scale of cultural trade in the new era, and are also of great significance for further cultivating new advantages in international economic cooperation and competition, promoting the construction of a strong socialist cultural country and enhancing the influence of Chinese culture.

2. Development status of China's foreign cultural trade

2.1 Fluctuating growth of China's foreign cultural trade volume

In terms of China's trade in cultural products with foreign countries, as a whole, China's trade in cultural products with foreign countries showed fluctuating growth from 2008 to 2023 (see Figure 1). Among them, China's foreign trade in cultural products grew at a faster rate from 2008-2014. The total import and export of cultural products grew from US\$43.30 billion in 2008 to US\$127.36 billion in 2014, nearly tripling; exports and imports gradually increased from US\$39.05 billion and US\$4.25 billion in 2008 to US\$111.83 billion and US\$15.54 billion in 2014, respectively. From 2015-2016, China's foreign cultural products trade, on the other hand, declined for two consecutive years. And then in 2017-2020, China's foreign trade in cultural products showed a small growth trend. But in 2021-2022, China's trade in cultural products with foreign countries increased significantly, with the total trade value increasing from 108.69 billion USD in 2020 to 180.26 billion USD in 2022, and the trade value of exports and imports increasing from 97.20 billion USD in 2020 and 11.49 billion USD in 2022 to 163.68 billion USD in 2022 and 16.59 billion USD in 2022, respectively. In 2023, China's imports of cultural products increased slightly, but exports declined by 11.5% year-on-year, to a 10% year-on-year decline in total trade.

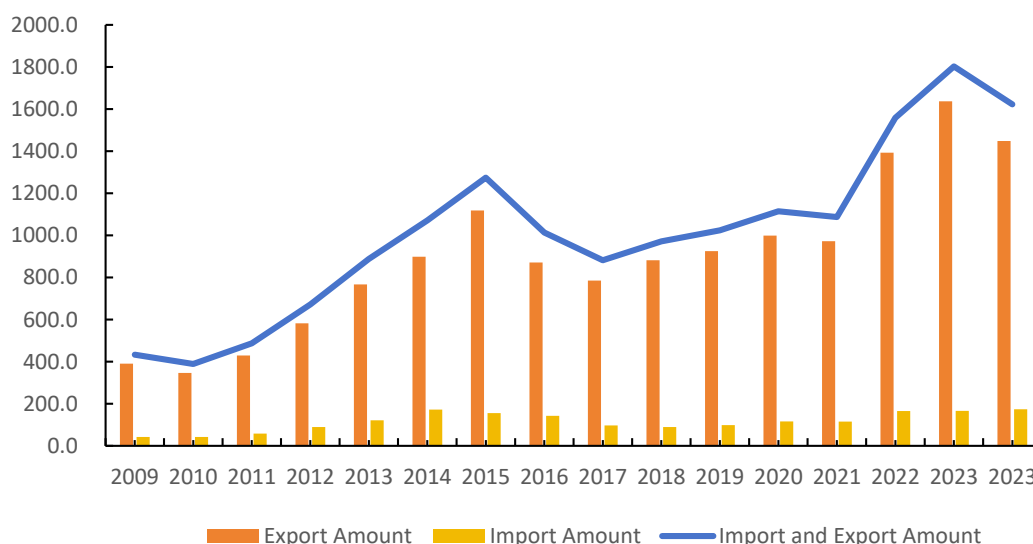


Figure 1: Development of China's foreign trade in cultural products, 2008-2023 (unit: USD billion)

In terms of China's foreign trade in cultural services, the import and export value of cultural trade shows an overall growth trend from 2013 to 2022. It increased from US\$10.65 billion in 2013 to US\$41.4 billion in 2022 (see Figure 2). Specifically, the growth rate of China's cultural trade volume in 2013-2018 was relatively fast, the growth rate in 2019-2020 slowed down significantly, and China's foreign cultural services import and export trade volume in 2021 increased rapidly to

44.22 billion U.S. dollars, with a year-on-year growth rate of 24.18%, the growth rate of the highest in the past five years, while the cultural trade volume in 2022 showed the first decline in a decade, with a year-on-year decline of 6.38%.

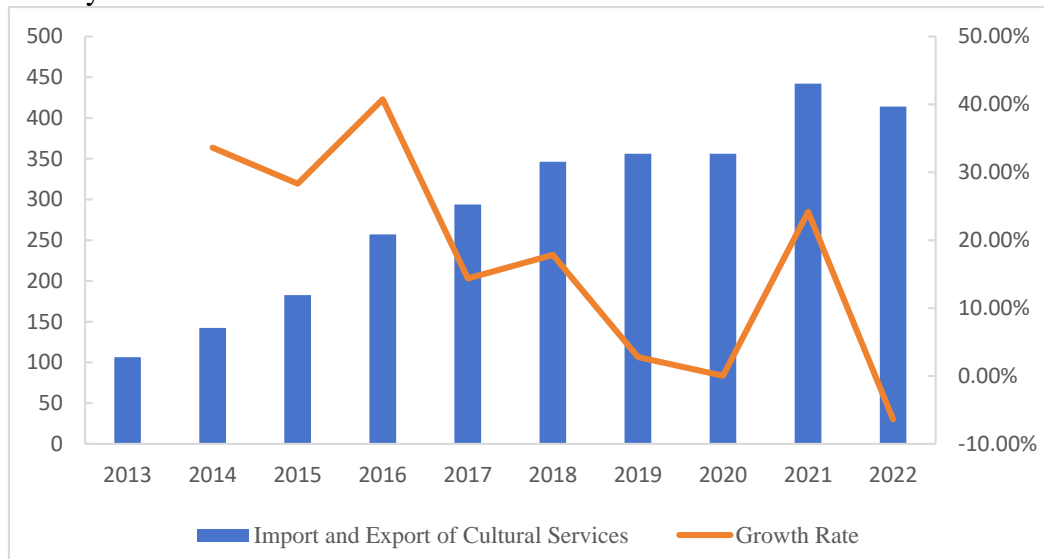


Figure 2: Development of China's foreign trade in cultural services, 2013-2022.

2.2 The development of China's cultural industry rebounded to good, and the performance of new cultural industry is bright

In 2023, under the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee, all regions and departments in china conscientiously implemented the decision-making and deployment of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, accelerated the soundness of the modern cultural industry system and the market system, and actively pushed forward the development of the cultural enterprises to continue to rebound and improve. According to statistics, in 2023, enterprises of culture and related industries above designated size nationwide achieved operating income of 12.95 trillion yuan, up 8.2% year-on-year. In terms of sub-fields, the core cultural fields achieved operating income of 8.40 trillion yuan, up 12.2% year-on-year, contributing 93.3% to the operating income growth of all cultural enterprises above designated size. Culture-related fields achieved operating income of 4.55 trillion yuan, up 1.5% year-on-year.

The new cultural industry has performed brilliantly, and become a key driving force to promote the transformation and upgrading of China's cultural industry, and to enhance quality and efficiency. The data show that the 16 subcategories of industries with more obvious characteristics of new cultural industries achieved an operating income of 5.24 trillion yuan, an increase of 15.3% over the previous year, which was 7.1 percentage points faster than that of all cultural enterprises above designated size. The contribution rate of the new cultural industries to the growth of operating income of all cultural enterprises above designated size exceeded 70 per cent.

2.3 The rapid development of China's digital cultural trade, opening up a new pattern of cultural trade development

Digital cultural trade is a new transnational cultural trade mode centred on digital technology, with digital content as the trade object and digital delivery as the form of realisation, the essence of which is the cross-border flow of culture-related data elements. Compared with traditional cultural trade, digital cultural trade can help realise greater economic and cultural value[3]. Empowered by

digital technology, cultural products and services are able to break through time and space limitations and realise timely transmission in a wider range, and the scale of cultural trade can be further expanded. According to statistics, in 2023, the import and export value of China's cultural products reached 162.18 billion US dollars, the scale of which is among the world's largest, and the foreign cultural trade basically maintains a good development trend. At the same time, new cultural industries represented by digital games and online literature continue to emerge and show strong explosive power in overseas markets, becoming a new growth point in the development of cultural trade. 2023, the actual sales revenue of China's self-developed games in overseas markets was about 117.516 billion yuan, and the scale of the overseas market for online literature exceeded 4 billion yuan, and China's digital cultural products and services have gradually become an important part of international cultural trade, and cultural trade has basically maintained a good development trend. An important part of international cultural trade, the value chain of cultural industry will be continuously extended and upgraded with digital technology support, promoting the high-quality development of foreign cultural trade.

3. Problems Existing at the Present Stage of China's Foreign Cultural Trade

In recent years, along with the rapid development of cultural trade in the world, China's foreign cultural trade has been maintaining a relatively stable growth trend. In addition, driven by the rapid development of digital technology, digital cultural trade has opened up a new pattern of China's foreign cultural trade, with greater potential for future development. However, at the same time, the high-quality development of China's foreign cultural trade still faces some problems.

3.1 Structural imbalance in China's foreign cultural trade

At this stage, although the total amount of import and export of China's foreign cultural trade is large, there is still an imbalance in the internal export structure of cultural trade. The proportion of core cultural products and services in China's foreign cultural trade is relatively low. According to data from the General Administration of Customs (see Figure 3), in 2022, the highest export value of China's cultural product exports was in the category of cultural goods, with an export value of US\$88.83 billion, accounting for 54.3 per cent of the total export value of cultural products; followed by arts and crafts and collectibles, with an export value of US\$41.08 billion, accounting for 25.1 per cent of the total export value of cultural products. Most of these cultural products are labour-intensive, with low cultural content, and are usually located at the bottom of the value chain of the cultural industry, with low added value. The export value of publication-type cultural products with higher cultural content, such as books, newspapers, periodicals and audio-visual products and electronic publications, accounted for a lower proportion of the total export value of cultural products, and the export value of publications was US\$4.11 billion in 2022, accounting for only 2.5 per cent of the total export value of cultural products. These cultural products are knowledge-intensive products, usually located in the upstream of the value chain of the cultural industry, and these products with high cultural content play an important role in spreading Chinese culture and expanding its influence, as well as promoting the high-quality development of foreign cultural trade. In addition, in terms of cultural service exports, the scale of trade and exports of personal, cultural and entertainment services is much smaller than that of royalty and licence fee services. The long-term imbalance in the structure of China's cultural exports will hinder the high-quality development of foreign cultural trade.

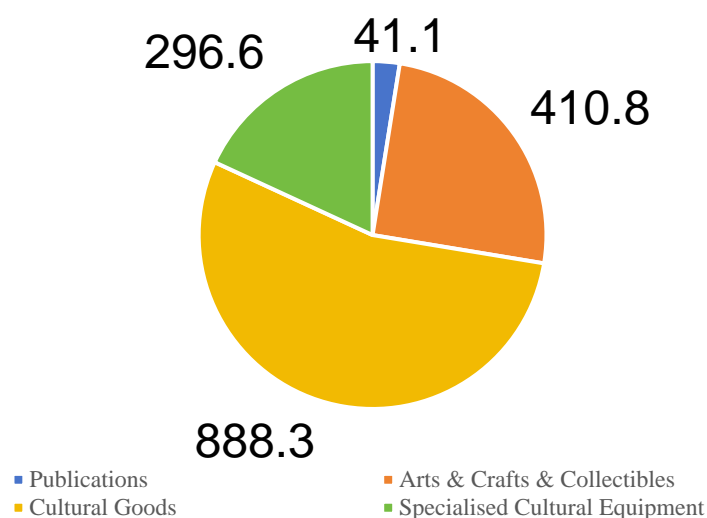


Figure 3: Exports of cultural goods by commodity group, 2022

3.2 Insufficient development of cultural and related industries and insufficient competitiveness of cultural industries

The enhancement of the competitiveness of cultural industry is an important foundation for the high-quality development of a country's foreign cultural trade, and has a strong supporting effect on the development of a country's foreign cultural trade. Therefore, cultural industry and foreign cultural trade are interconnected and mutually supportive. If a country's domestic cultural industry has a low degree of development and a low degree of integration with related industries, it will reduce the competitiveness of a country's foreign cultural trade, which in turn will affect the high-quality development of its foreign trade. At present, for China, although the cultural industry is in the stage of rapid development and the scale of the industry is expanding, the development of China's cultural industry is limited due to the late start of the development of China's cultural industry, and there are problems such as the construction of the cultural industry chain is not sound, the development of the key links in the production of cultural content is backward, and there are deficiencies in the convergence of various links. The future development of China's cultural industry still needs to be strengthened, and the international competitiveness and international market share of the cultural industry still need to be improved in the context of digitalisation. In addition, as the cross-fertilisation of cultural industry and other different industries is an inevitable trend for future development, at present, China's cultural industry needs to be strengthened in both horizontal expansion and vertical extension. By perfecting and optimising the links of the domestic cultural industry chain, the development of cultural industry can be further promoted, which will in turn lead to the enhancement of the overall competitiveness of China's foreign cultural trade.

3.3 The digital development level of cultural enterprises is not high, and the market vitality needs to be further enhanced.

With the significant improvement of market vitality of Chinese cultural enterprises, the depth and breadth of enterprises' integration with digital technology in the production and sales of cultural products and services are also increasing. The increase in the level of digitalisation of cultural products and services not only improves the efficiency of cultural production, but also helps to improve the quality of cultural products and services, which is crucial for cultural enterprises. The 'quality' of a product is its intrinsic value, technology and creativity. At present, the value-carrying

capacity of Chinese cultural products is still insufficient, and the trade competitiveness of core cultural products is still weak, so it is urgent to enhance the diversification of their products and services through the integration of digital technology. In addition, at present, the export value-added of China's branded cultural products and services is still low, and the homogenisation of brands is more serious, not only are there fewer famous brands in digital fields such as animation, film and television, and games, but the innovative transformation efficiency of Chinese excellent traditional culture, such as old Chinese brands, traditional brands, and classic logos, and other cultural elements and contents, is low, and it fails to give full play to the transformation and upgrading process of traditional cultural brands. The advantages of digital technology have not been fully utilised in the transformation and upgrading of traditional cultural brands. Therefore, in the future, China still needs to guide and promote enterprises to combine online and offline channels and platforms, and continue to increase creative development and brand building to increase the added value of cultural products and services for export.

3.4 Insufficient cultural creativity and lack of high-end talents in cultural trade

The 20th Party Congress pointed out that education, science and technology, talent is the basic and strategic support for the comprehensive construction of a modern socialist country. Must adhere to science and technology is the first productive force, talent is the first resource, innovation is the first power, in-depth implementation of science and education strategy, talent strategy, innovation-driven development strategy, to open up new areas of development and new track, and constantly shape the development of new momentum and new advantages. Cultural industry belongs to creative industry, which is talent-intensive and technology-intensive. At present, China's cultural trade advantage areas are still dominated by labour-intensive industries, which is inconsistent with China's strategic goal of high-quality development of cultural industry[4]. High-quality development requires high requirements for production factors such as creativity, science and technology, and talents. In terms of cultural creativity, China's foreign cultural trade still has the problems of copycat imitation and copy processing for a long time, and there are fewer products with creative innovation and independent intellectual property rights. In terms of high technology, our country is not mature enough in the development of science and technology-enabled cultural industry, and the integration of culture and science and technology creates fewer new forms of business. And this is inextricably linked to the problems in the training of cultural industry talents in China.

4. Countermeasures Suggestions for Enhancing the Development of China's Foreign Cultural Trade

Vigorously promoting the high-quality development of China's trade in cultural services is of great significance in enhancing the competitiveness of China's cultural trade, and it is also the proper meaning for China to build a cultural power in the future. On the basis of analysing and explaining the basic development trend of China's foreign trade in cultural services and the main problems existing in foreign trade in cultural services, this paper points out that the high-quality development of China's foreign trade in cultural services should be achieved through the following ways.

4.1 Optimise the structure of foreign cultural trade and achieve balanced development of commodity structure and country structure.

The structure of foreign cultural trade depends to a large extent on the development structure of

domestic cultural industry. Therefore, the balanced development of China's cultural industry is crucial to optimising the structure of foreign cultural trade and enhancing the international competitiveness of cultural trade. As for the commodity structure, while continuing to promote the rapid development of the industries of cultural goods and arts and crafts, China should maintain the dominant position of cultural goods, arts and crafts and collectibles in cultural export trade. In addition, China should focus on the development of cultural and creative industries that involve a large amount of high intellectual labour, and through optimizing the structure of cultural industries, shift the overall advantage of China's cultural export trade from 'cost' to 'creativity'. Combined with the wide application of digital technology in the cultural field, through strengthening technological innovation and R&D investment as well as the cultivation of professional and high-quality talents and other measures, to gradually change China's disadvantage in knowledge-and technology-intensive cultural products, and gradually improve the single structure of the export of cultural products. In terms of country structure, China should continue to strengthen cultural trade exchanges with the countries along the 'Belt and Road' in the future, so as to promote the diversification of country structure.

4.2 Increase the application and integration of digital technology in cultural and related industries

In recent years, the rapid development of digital technologies such as blockchain, big data, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and the Internet has made the digital economy present unprecedented development potential, and has also made the breadth and depth of the integration of the digital economy with various fields of society continuously improve. The digital economy was first written into the State Council government work report in 2017, and the development of the digital economy has risen to a national strategy. The rapid development of the digital economy has also accelerated the integration of China's cultural industry with various other industries, which also provides an important opportunity for the high-quality development of foreign cultural trade. On the one hand, China should seize the opportunity of the rapid development of the digital economy in the future and integrate its achievements into the development of cultural industries and cultural trade. It is necessary to continue to optimise the relevant infrastructure and innovate digital technology to further promote the development of digital industries and the real economy, and provide strong support for the digitisation of the cultural industry and the 'intellectualisation' of the cultural industry. On the other hand, it is necessary to strengthen the construction of diversified application scenarios of 'digital economy + culture', such as 'blockchain + culture', 'big data + culture' and other new forms and modes. In addition, more policy support should be given to the integration and development of digital technology and cultural trade, so that the popularisation, innovation and upgrading of technology can play an important role in reducing costs and increasing efficiency in cultural trade. At the same time, strong support and encouragement from the government and other relevant departments will help create and maintain a safe and stable digital environment, reduce the uncertainties brought by the digital economy to cultural trade, and thus promote the high-quality development of digital cultural trade.

4.3 Improve the efficiency of digital transformation of cultural enterprises and enhance the market competitiveness of cultural enterprises

For China, transforming excellent traditional culture into innovative products with modern technological and network intelligence features is of great significance in driving the development of China's foreign cultural trade. The transformation of cultural resources cannot be separated from the digital development of cultural enterprises. Firstly, we should vigorously cultivate the

innovative thinking ability of cultural enterprises in the era of digital economy, so as to provide a constant impetus for the creation and production of diversified cultural products and services from the root. It is also necessary to continuously cultivate innovative talents to provide a guarantee for the digital transformation of enterprises. Secondly, cultural enterprises are encouraged to increase their investment in the research and development of digital technology and improve the scientific and technological innovation ability of cultural enterprises. The ability of scientific and technological innovation has gradually become the first driving force to promote the development of the cultural industry in a better direction. As the development of science and technology becomes more and more in-depth, the dissemination speed of cultural products will become faster and faster, and the platform media will no longer follow the same pattern, and the dissemination content will be constantly updated and the coverage will become more and more extensive. It is necessary to combine the characteristics of the era of digital economy, pay attention to the differentiated consumption preferences of trade partner countries for cultural products and services, formulate different market strategies, and improve the international competitiveness of cultural enterprises. Thirdly, we need to create well-known digital cultural brands. By deeply integrating traditional Chinese cultural brands with digital technology, we can optimise and create digital cultural brands with Chinese characteristics that meet the development needs of today's era, satisfy the actual needs of the international cultural consumption market, and escort China's culture to go global in the era of digital economy.

4.4 Industry-university-research co-operation in educating people, cultivating compound culture trade talents

High-end talents are the first resource for the high-quality development of cultural industry, and they are one of the key elements to promote the transformation of China's cultural trade from labour-intensive to knowledge-intensive. Culture trade is a highly applied industry, and traditional school education is difficult to keep pace with the development of the industry. In the current international environment, China's foreign cultural trade needs to understand both economic trade and cross-cultural communication of the composite marketing talents, but also need to understand both the application of science and technology and cultural production of the composite creative talents. The cultivation of composite talents requires composite cultivation force. This requires the concerted efforts of the government, schools, enterprises and society to provide more talents for the country.

5. Conclusion

As an emerging point of competition in international trade, trade in cultural services has become an important part of China's foreign trade and a major way of cultural dissemination and exchange between countries[5]. The high-quality development of foreign trade in cultural services is of great significance for promoting Chinese outstanding culture and enhancing national soft power. In this paper, we believe that on the basis of accurately grasping the basic trend and main problems in the development of China's foreign cultural services trade, we can make efforts to optimise the structure of foreign cultural trade, increase the integration of digital technology and the cultural industry, improve the efficiency of the digital transformation of cultural enterprises, and cultivate composite cultural trade talents, etc., so as to promote China's foreign cultural services trade to achieve high-quality development.

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