Chinese Dream and American Dream: A Cultural Interpretation

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Chinese dream and American dream reach the same end by different means. So Chinese dream and American dream are similar, they are expressed in different ways, and different expressions originate from different cultures and civilizations. So how to facilitate cross-cultural understanding? I have three points: first, recognize the diversity of Western civilization; second, striking a connection between China and the West; third, a reflexive approach.

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Lately, there are many comparatives about Chinese Dream and American Dream, they think there are similarities and differences, but I think Chinese Dream shares similar aspirations with American Dream.

Xi jinping put forward, Chinese Dream has three dimensions: national prosperity, rejuvenation and people’s happiness. I think American Dream is also the same. Just like Henry Kissinger said: Chinese dream and American dream reach the same end by different means. And Henry Kissinger analyzed the association of “Chinese dream” and “American Dream”:

The American dream comes from the constant pursuit of the American people to improve their living conditions, they believe that tomorrow will always be better, and Chinese people suffered tremendous suffering during the past 150-200 years, therefore, looking forward to the Chinese dream is a very important event. Although the origin is not the same, but the ultimate state of the two dream is consistent, the pursuit is very similar: a more peaceful, prosperous and cooperative world.

The 24th U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao said: whatever the American dream or the Chinese dream, are both the two people longing for a better life, and the desire for a better life of the two countries people are universal, from yearning of the human heart.

So Chinese dream and American dream are similar, they are expressed in different ways. We collected some pictures about Chinese Dream and American Dream. We find Chinese Dream is often associated with images of a prosperous and strong nation, they focus on Chinese theme, describe a country’s great power, it is a grand narrative, but American Dream pictures a peaceful, free, and joyful daily life of individuals. So I think Chinese Dream and American Dream are expressed in different ways, and different expressions originate from different cultures and civilizations.

So how to facilitate cross-cultural understanding? I have three points in the following.

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Recognize the Diversity of Western Civilization

Do Not Treat Western Civilization as a Monolith

In China, “the west” is an “imagined community”, which exists in the fields of social life, foreign politics, film culture, and academic research.

In contemporary western scholars, from Samuel Huntington to Edward Said, from Michel Foucault to Immanuel Wallerstein, although different angles are discussed in the system of world civilization, but all recognize the reality that regards the West as a whole and dominates the discourse power of the contemporary world. The West has been widely recognized as a break of regional restrictions and based on the history of civilization, and then constructed a western “other”—the east, which based on the logic of Western discourse, and the United States as the only superpower in the world today, as a representative of the western world, dominates the international civilization system and the international political system. However, as a kind of dynamic existence, the world civilization system has been undergoing transformation and reintegration.

“The clash of Civilizations” emphasized the cultural differences on the impact of the development of the world, but ignored the conflict and differences in culture.

After hundreds of years of development and spread of Western civilization, the internal is also expanding, the division is inevitable, or that today’s western civilization has gradually split and diversified. The internal diversification trend of Western civilization is increasingly obvious, the integrity of the whole of the Western civilization has been hit, and there is further “split” trend.

Since 1980s, the rapid development of the globalization of information and capital globalization has contributed to the formation of the global system, many problems involved in the interests of the whole human being are beyond the differences of traditional ideology, social system and structure, the traditional civilization, formed the pattern of global governance, the gulf between the East and the West has played down in many world’s problems. This is why research data reveal the differences between the United States and the Western European countries in world governance and cultural cognitive.

So, it is not easy to equate American civilization with Western civilization. As a matter of fact, there is no universal civilization in the world at all.

The concept of “West” does not simply point to the Western civilization, but includes the developed national interest groups based on the national interests and the degree of social and economic development.

Recognize the Difference Between Chinese and Western Civilization

American civilization is from Western civilization. But we cannot simply equate American civilization with Western civilization.

The meaning of “harmonious yet different” is to re-examine themselves with a strange “others” vision. Inter subjective, rational communication, equal dialogue, learn from each other, so that the old system will rebirth. This “dialogue” is always a kind of power, there is no need to force the same, and should be devoted to seeking common ground and learning from each other and common development. “Harmonious yet different” provides the methodology basis for multicultural coexistence and mutual complement each other and common development.

The main characterization of Globalization in the field of culture is to break the original closed narrow boundaries, and provide a platform of world communication to all countries and cultures. So it is necessary to recognize not only the heterogeneity of Chinese and Western culture, but also the possibility, necessity, and
urgency of the mutual reference and complement of different cultures, more to adhere to the openness and subjectivity. This will promote the opening of national culture and the diversity of world culture.

**The Dialogue Between Civilizations Is Possible**

We should not only recognize the similarities between European and American civilizations, but also see the diversity of world civilizations and the possibility of dialogue among different civilizations.

We should recognize the diversity of world civilizations, uphold the traditional Chinese philosophy of being “harmonious yet different”, and facilitate mutual understanding and resolution of international problems or conflicts through soft power diplomacy.

In the religious belief and values, there are obvious differences in the western countries, and even the value “gap”. As well as the economically developed capitalist society, Western European countries and the United States have also become more and more diverse in their attitude towards social problems and international problems. That is to say, the western world is not using a “brain” in thinking. Whether the media or the academic world, it must be specific issues or specific analysis, cannot always put the “western” countries as a whole. On the international front, western countries do not always keep step with, we also should treat differently when we look at the issue. In the interpretation and dissemination of public opinion, it is to adhere to the diversity of civilization, according to the specific state of civilization, deep inside the “West”, this is the right way of analysis. And if the Western Europe and the United States will be placed together, especially when the United States and China are not at the same position on international issues, we still refer to the United States and the western society as a whole, then we will lose the discourse power.

**Striking a Connection Between China and the West**

Since the modern times, the western culture has been in a strong position for a long time, the inevitable self expansion, and the formation of colonialism, racism, extreme nationalism, cultural chauvinism and western centralism thoughts. In twenty-first century, the reflection of the western academic circles reached a very deep level. They not only attach the beneficial nutrition from other cultures, but also reflect on their own from the position of “the other”, to obtain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of their own. In particular, they continue to discover the wisdom of the eastern culture, get inspiration, and try to integrate the spirit of Oriental Culture in the Western cultural foundation, in order to better develop their own culture.

Today, it is hard to say what is pure, immutable traditional Chinese culture. Only in the specific analysis of the history and current situation of Chinese and Western culture, can it be possible to find a practical way to achieve the equal dialogue between Chinese and Western culture.

In Toynbee’s view, the movement of any civilization is essentially a process of spiritual ascension and decline, and the carrier of spiritual ascension and decline is religion. Therefore, religion is the core of civilization, the nature of religion determines the nature of civilization, the rise and fall of religion determines the rise and fall of civilization.

Between the East and the west, especially between China and the western society, showing a different form of civilization, religion is the core source. Chinese people tend to be practical in the secular world, with a strong pragmatism, they are realistic from the social ideal to personal goals, and pay attention to the actual effect.

Western traditional culture is from the Christian religion, emphasis on equality before God, Christianity constitutes an important spiritual foundation of western culture.
Therefore, although the Chinese and Western culture are consistent in the ultimate pursuit, there are still differences in the specific practice of the path.

The form of new core values should be based on the national and the international situations, and the most important is to care and responsibility for the fate of mankind as a whole. The core value system of Western civilization after the Second World War, for example democracy, freedom and rule of law, human rights, equality, fairness, justice, etc., these contents are generally agreed by the people of the world today, and also the future trend of the development of human civilization. But to recognize a problem, is dialogue between the universal value and other civilizations. After the end of the “cold war”, the Western civilization seems to stand out in conflict with the rest of the world civilization, sometimes showing a dominant trend in the direction of the development of the world civilization. “The superiority of Western civilization” was once popular. In the process of world civilization contacts, a so-called “universal value-civilization transformation” dialogue mode has become popular. This is a kind of education mode. There are many drawbacks.

Since ancient times, China has regarded “harmonious yet different” as the wisdom of the development of human civilization. If the core value of a civilization is destroyed, it is bound to hurt its original internal power, and even leads to the disappearance of the civilization. Different civilizations can renew themselves if only full dialogue based on mutual trust.

Professor ZHANG Kaiyuan said: Correctly treat the status of Chinese traditional culture in the national core value system, one is to believe the modernity of traditional culture, two is to recognize the diversity of traditional culture, three is to understand the change of traditional culture. To this end, it is an urgent task to provide an open, democratic and liberal environment. Today, China should be more confident in the treatment of foreign culture.

So the commonalities between different cultures are relative and differences are fundamental. QIAN Zhongshu is Chinese famous scholar and writer, his research approach is striking a connection of cross-fertilization between Chinese and Western cultures.

This approach is relevant for today’s world, which is featured by “globalization” and “integration”.

We should seek commonalities between Eastern and Western cultures and use them as cultural bases to facilitate East-West cultural exchanges and equal dialogues.

**A Reflexive Approach**

Francois Jullien is a famous French sinologist and philosopher. In his study of Chinese culture, he adopted a reflexive approach to better understand Western culture and Greek philosophy. New perspectives will emerge if one looks at his own culture from an external point of view, through which new discoveries about one’s own culture can be made. This cross cultural study regards “inter subjectivity” and “mutual reference” as the core, paying attention to “other” in contrast, from another culture to understand their own culture, is to development traditional culture in inheriting its culture.

The mode of Francois Jullien’s “detour and access” is the way to seek “different” in different national cultures. Francois Jullien is walking the road of advocating “different”, because he has a deep understanding of what Chuang-tzu said, “things are not neat, it is the nature of the material.”

Similarly, we can use the reflexive approach to better understand our own cultural tradition by studying the Western cultures. This will help us to develop our culture with new idea. Seen from a Western point of view, one can gain fresh insight into the Chinese culture.
Conclusion

Today human civilization has been in an unprecedented crisis, with economic growth, political confrontation and human greed reaching the limit. The consequences arising from these entanglements have spread across all aspects of social life around the world. Humans are destroying their own living environment, and thus may eventually destroy themselves. Academia describes shared interests as the “greatest common divisor”, which holds human society together. They are the best teachers of mankind, and also the most powerful cohesion force. More and more people of insight are seriously considering how to correctly deal with the relationship between human overall interests and national interests. Long regarded as the holy nation and nationalism, must withstand a reevaluation of the axiom of human of the global integration, in order to have contributed to human pollution removal and human Gongli seek.

Being “Harmonious yet different”, is to seek common ground and learn from each other for common development. To re-examine ourselves from the perspective of “others” is through equal dialogue and learning from each other, which could breathe new life into the old system. The idea of being “harmonious yet different” provides a highly workable methodological basis for the coexistence and common development of multiple cultures.

References