

“Harmonious and Integrated Culture” and the Building and Communication of China’s National Image

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This paper deals with building and communicating China’s national image based on harmonious and integrated (*he-he*) culture. Harmonious and integrated culture is a quintessentially important value of Chinese culture. Harmonious and integrated thoughts run through the whole process of the entire development of Chinese thoughts and culture. The national image of one country embodies its power and influence. A good national image can engender a strong flow of cohesion and fascination and promote international communication and cooperation. Building a good national image is of special significance for China today. Based on the deep understanding of the connotation and modern significance of harmonious and integrated culture, coupled with China’s actual situation, it is proposed that the defining characteristics of China’s national image at present should be openness, tolerance, accountability, cooperation, stability, peace, integrity, harmony, development, vigor, and opportunity. It is urgent and practical to build and communicate China’s national image with a full illustration of China’s history of harmonious and integrated thoughts and culture.

Harmonious and integrated (*he-he*) culture, a quintessentially important value of Chinese culture, has attracted the attention and focus of many scholars. Some famous experts and scholars (such as Chen, 1998; Qian, 1982; Tang, 1997, 1998, 1999; Zhang, 1995, 1996, 1998; Zhang, 1997, 2003, 2006, etc.) have made their research into this topic concerning its effects and modern significance, and aimed at revealing its connotations, essence, and the role it plays in Chinese cultural history. The ever-improving modern media technology is quickening the process of cultural globalization. The consideration and application of cultural soft power has reached the national strategic level (Wu, 2009). There is an internal relation between cultural communication with the outside world and the building of national image, and the former is an efficient means of the latter (Wu, 2009).

Besides the above introduction, this paper consists of four parts. Firstly, it touches upon what is “harmonious and integrated culture” and what is “national image.” Secondly, it deals with the modern connotations and value of “harmonious and integrated culture.” Thirdly, it offers the author’s views on building and communicating China’s national image at present, based on Chinese traditional “harmonious and integrated culture.” And finally, conclusions are made based on the above discussion.

Definitions: “Harmonious and Integrated Culture” and National Image

Harmonious and Integrated Culture

In general, it is believed that *harmony* in “harmonious and integrated culture” refers to amity, peace, kindness, geniality, neutrality, and so forth, and that *integration* in “harmonious and integrated culture” means convergence, combination, association, blending, or merging, cooperation, rationality, and so forth. Both words bear the meaning of relationship and association. The connotation of the combination of harmony and integration is that different things can be integrated into one common unity that co-exists and whose parts are interdependent. In the process of integrating, the common unity has taken in the advantages and discarded the disadvantages of these compositions so that it provokes and gives impetus to new things. In fact, harmonious and integrated culture does not deny or preclude contradiction, differences, or even fighting if necessary. Instead, it has two basic elements: acknowledgment of difference, like *yin* and *yang*, heaven and human, male and female, and so forth, and unity of differences, such as the unity of *yin* and *yang*, or the unity of heaven and human.

National Image

Many experts have carried out their research and discussed such questions as “What is national image?” and “How should we define it?” Views are offered by experts of various research backgrounds as follows: (1) National image is the public’s overall general knowledge and evaluation of the comprehensive power, external vitality, and prospects of development of a country; it is the general impression, vision, and attitude in the public’s mind toward its natural resources, economy, politics, society, science and technology, culture, history, environment, people, and leaders (Chen, 2008); (2) National image is an overall impression of a country made in people’s minds (Ming, 2009); and (3) The international image of a country is other peoples’ comprehensive recognition and evaluation of the political, economic, social, cultural, and natural matters of the country (Guan & Liu, 2008).

National image in this article refers to the public (both at home and abroad) overall and general recognition, evaluation and impression of a country (including its economy), science and technology, the social and political system, history and culture, living conditions, and so forth.

Modern Connotation and Value of Harmonious and Integrated Culture

History of Harmonious and Integrated Culture

The two characters harmony (*he*) and integration (*he*) both first appeared in *jiaguwen* (inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells) and *jing* or king language. The primary meaning of harmony is the concord of sounds, and integration is the closure of the upper and lower lips. In the Yin and Zhou dynasties, harmony and integration formed a single concept while both

were used separately. Harmony can be found in *The Book of Changes*, meaning harmony and kindness, while there is no integration in it. In *The Book of History*, harmony means the treatments of conflicts in social and interpersonal relations, and integration refers to conformity and accordance. In the Spring and Autumn Period Times (*chun qiu shi qi*, one of the eras of ancient China), harmony and integration were combined to form the word harmony and integration, meaning that only if something has differences and diversity, can it produce something and develop further. Many books like *Remarks of States*, *The Confucian Analects*, *Lao Zi*, *Guan Zi*, *Mo Zi*, and *Yi Zuan* explain or illustrate the meaning and connotations of harmony and integration or harmony and integration .

Interpreting the Connotations of “Harmonious and Integrated Culture”

Harmonious and integrated culture is the most active core element in traditional Chinese thought and culture. It not only requires harmony between individual body and soul, person to person, community and society, human beings and nature, but also puts emphasis on the co-existence between heaven and humans, and the other and oneself. Generally, traditional harmonious and integrated culture asks people to seek for the common and to preserve the different, to understand each other, to co-exist peacefully, to advance mutually, and to develop together (Deng, 2008).

Present Value of Harmonious and Integrated Culture

The present value of harmonious and integrated culture lies in its (1) principle of constructing a harmonious society, (2) effective strategy of leading a country, (3) coordinating mechanism of adjusting social interests, and (4) a way of thinking about solving problems (Zhou, 2006). As there are more than 200 countries in today’s world, many civilizations and cultures co-exist and develop around the globe. Conflicts and differences among them are unavoidable. Then how can we deal with these differences? The best methods should not be to rely on arms or force, but on a well-accepted means. In this context, harmonious and integrated culture can be a solution to these problems, since one of its core points is to seek for the common and to preserve the different. The successful return of Hong Kong and Macau to the Chinese mainland is a case in point.

Building and Communicating of China’s National Image at Present

Often, in many mainstream western media, China is still depicted as a poor and underdeveloped country with a bad human rights record. While China’s economy has been developing quickly, it still has serious environmental problems, a wide gap between the poor and rich, many potential financial crises, and many other social problems. Furthermore, with its increasingly stronger power, China has become a menace to the world’s economy, energy, and military forces (Ming, 2008). Ramo (2008) warned that the issue of China’s international image is the thorniest strategic problem facing China today, and that in some sense, its national image will provide for China’s prospect and determine the fate of reform and

development (Ramo, 2008). However, on the whole, studies on the national image of China are still at a primary stage (Li, 2005). Therefore, China should keep an eye on international views and judgments about China's national image, and modify it consistently so as to build a developmental, reformist, open, democratic, cooperative, and friendly image of a big country (Li, 2005).

Positioning/Clarifying China's National Image

Precisely positioning China's national image is the pre-requisite and basis for its building development and communication, because positioning China's national image is the concentrated reflection of China's development mode, orientation, and strategy, and the basic point and core of national image (Chen, 2008). Regarding the positioning of China's national image, some scholars have voiced their views of China's national image as follows: (1) Peace-loving, advanced, and civilized, just, and kind, faithful and responsible are the most fundamental inner symbols for the position of China's international image (Zhu & Cheng, 2006); (2) China should build a confident, open, united, cooperative, independent, and responsible image in the world and peoples' minds (Wu, 2009); (3) China's international image should be positioned as a power in pursuit of prosperity, democracy, civilization, peace, justice, responsibility, and cooperation (Chen, 2008).

Through researching and interpreting the connotation and present value of harmonious and integrated culture, coupled with current world situations and China's status quo and prospect of development, it is believed that China's current national image should be roughly positioned as open, tolerant, responsibility-sharing, cooperative, stable, peaceful, just, harmonious, developing, and full of vigor and opportunities. In more detail, these include:

1. *Open and tolerant.* Opening-up is China's long-term national policy, and it is a multi-sided, multi-tiered, and multi-disciplinary one. Different advanced technologies, administrative lessons, management concepts, and culture and arts have been imported and introduced from other countries and regions, and various kinds of values and life-styles are coexisting and developing well in China. This suggests that China is always open to the world, and Chinese people are tolerant.

2. *Accountable.* China is a steadfast force for maintaining world peace and stability; it never forgets its duty, and it always courageously shoulders its responsibility in the face of crises (like the Asian financial crisis, the international fight against terrorism and current world economic crisis).

3. *Cooperative and stable.* China endeavors to maintain its domestic stability in its political, economic, and social aspects in spite of various kinds of obstacles, and it increasingly actively takes part in various forms of cooperation with other parties. For example, as for the nuclear issue in North Korea and the World Climate Conference, China spared no efforts to work out a solution together with other concerning parties.

4. *Peaceful and just.* Chinese people are traditionally peace-loving and justice-pursuing, and they are eager for peace and justice like many other nations. The famous "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence," proposed by the late Premier Chou Enlai in the 1950s, has been

carried out by Chinese people ever since. Furthermore, whenever wars broke out, China always called for constraint and a peaceful solution.

5. *Harmonious and developing.* China is working at building a harmonious society in line with the spirit of the scientific development concept. The social and economic undertakings are under way in today's China, and this kind of momentum will be carried forward in the foreseeable future. Due to its economy-stimulating plan and other actions, China performed the best among the major economic powers in the face of the current world financial crisis, which made a great difference in recovering and maintaining world economic development.

6. *Full of vigor and opportunities.* China is now at a critical development stage in economy, science, and technology. All of these things are going well, and therefore there are numerous opportunities for success in many ways in China. Almost all of the world's leading companies are earning a great revenue in China's market despite the difficult economic situations at present, since China is full of business opportunities.

Building and Communicating China's National Image

Wang (2000) suggests that, in the building of China's national image in the twenty-first century, it is important to take nationality and thinking patterns into serious consideration to effectively display China's peculiar nationality and world outlook. Most westerners often compare China to a dragon, or a lion, or an elephant, which reveals their great concern over China's power and huge size (according to population, territory, and economy). Ming (2009) reminds us that there is still "little say" and "low visibility" for China in international news and mass media (Ming, 2009, p. 8).

Connotations like "harmony, yet difference," "peace-pursuing, open, inclusive, and people-oriented," "seeking for the common and preserving the different, understanding each other, co-existing peacefully, advancing mutually, and developing together," in a "harmonious and integrated culture" characterize China's thoughts and world outlook. Thus, it is beneficial for building and communicating China's national image to fully understand and make use of these deep connotations of harmonious and integrated culture. China should also strengthen its cultural exchange, interaction, and especially exports to enhance its influence on other countries, because culture, as a kind of soft power, will be weaker if enclosed, and stronger if communicated widely (Li, 2005).

Conclusion

Harmonious and integrated culture is the quintessentially important value of Chinese culture. Harmonious and integrated thoughts run through the whole span, of the entire development process of Chinese thoughts and culture. It is of particular significance for China to build an excellent national image and communicate it well at present. The defining characteristics of China's national image at present should be openness, tolerance, responsibility-sharing, cooperation, stability, peace, integrity, harmony, development, vitality, and opportunity. It is urgent and practical to build and communicate China's national image with a full illustration of China's history of harmonious and integrated thoughts and culture.

Also, for the communication of China's national image, China should not only attach importance to the full use of mass media and pan-public communication media, but also highly strengthen its communication in such aspects as its national policies, interpersonal communication, and product exports (Ming, 2008).

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