CHAPTER 4

Traditional Chinese Culture and East Asian Security Cooperation

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Abstract

By elaborating and analyzing traditional Chinese cultural concepts, such as the holistic, dialectical, and self-discipline views, this essay reveals the organic links between traditional cultural concepts and the strategic thinking of China’s diplomacy. The author believes that China’s plan in East Asian cooperation reflects traditional Chinese cultural concepts. The exploration and popularization of traditional Chinese cultural concepts would have a constructive effect on the future positive settlement of East Asian security issues, as well as the cooperation, stability, and integration of East Asia.

Keywords

China – cultural concepts – East Asian security

Of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, China is the only one from the East and is among the civilized ancient countries that has realized renewed vitality and vigor in the modern international system. China had existed for thousands of years—long before the birth of modern civilization. Therefore, China has consistently explored how to deal with relationships and development with other countries in accordance with its own cultural tradition, instead of blindly following others. China’s traditional culture plays an important role in its diplomatic practices and development. Meanwhile, China also attaches great importance to its influence and believes that advanced ideas are essential in resolving conflicts and keeping peace.

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Given the increase in complex and variable international issues, Western international theories increasingly fall short of expectations in their explanation and guidance. However, from the perspective of the development of a future international community, the ideas of both the East and the West can promote and integrate with each other, thus forming a new balance between the cultures. This integration will prove favorable in the attempt to change the unbalanced situation between Eastern and Western cultures and to transform the international value from a Western monopoly to pluralism. Furthermore, it plays a positive and constructive role in dealing with unfairness in international society, man-caused violent disasters, and deep-rooted hot spots. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the significance of Oriental culture, or traditional Chinese culture, for international relations. Chinese scholars have made some important efforts in this aspect.1

This essay proposes a solution to East Asian issues as an example to sketch the Eastern traditional idea from the ideas of holism, dialectics, and self-discipline. These interconnected aspects differ from each other in that holism and dialectics focus on the relations between oneself and others and the relations between short- and long-term interests, whereas self-discipline focuses on how to discipline oneself and how to influence others by changing oneself. It also embraces altruism and the idea of using one's virtues to win respect. In general, the Chinese theory of peace is not groundless. Its contribution lies in building a method that promotes win-win cooperation to reduce conflicts and strengthen harmony. It also promotes open-mindedness and flexibility, rather than narrow-mindedness and rigidity and stresses that people should act in accordance with morals by happily extending their hands to others.

This essay comprises four main parts. The introduction describes the main features of traditional Chinese culture. The first part mainly describes the basic connotation of holism, or zhengti guan 整体观. The second part emphasizes the characteristics of dialectical thinking, or bianzheng guan 辩证观. The third part discusses the constitution of self-discipline, or zilü 自律 and its effect on China’s diplomacy. The fourth part discusses the North Korean nuclear issue and the South China Sea problem, which are prominent issues in current Eastern Asian culture, and takes these issues as examples in analyzing the constructive role of China’s traditional culture. Finally, the essay summaries the influence of traditional Chinese culture on the concept and practice of China’s diplomacy. This essay also points out that China’s

1 Qin Yaqing 秦亚青, “Zhongguo wenhua jiqi dui waijiaojuece yingxiang 中国文化及其对外交决策影响 [Chinese Culture and Its Implications for Foreign Policy-making],” *International Studies*, No. 5. 2011, 27.