CHAPTER 15


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The formation and structure of national cultural security issues are different in every country. Different countries have different rules for the emergence and development of cultural security. China’s current national cultural security issues emerged for historical reasons. Since the rise in China of historical threats and humiliations in the modern era, China has seen the historical emergence and formation of national cultural security policies. In the struggles to save the nation from destruction, resist imperialism, and fight against feudalism, China has consistently pursued the glorious revival of the Chinese nation, which became a theme for China in the modern era. Part of twentieth-century Chinese history involved the development, intellectual, and spiritual history of saving the Chinese nation from extinction. Existential and developmental security together have constituted the theme of twentieth-century China and cultural security.

The Opium War and the Formation of Chinese National Cultural Security Issues

The Opium War and the Formative Mechanisms of Chinese Cultural Security in the Modern Era

The Opium War was a tragedy for Chinese culture. Although superficially the Opium War was a war of imperialist aggression sparked by issues in the opium trade, it cannot be overstated how significantly the impact of this war was to Chinese historical development and distorted its national character. Moreover, it was more of a cultural war in which the forceful expansion of colonialism and capitalism opened China’s door to a cultural invasion. I claim that this was a cultural war because behind the historical imagery were two entirely opposing and conflicting world views and attitudes, as well as two different cultural values that lacked understanding and communication. The dominant
culture of the West first used the strength of its capital to invade Chinese cultural territory. Cultural security, as part of national existential and developmental security, for the first time in a historically significant sense became an issue of Chinese national cultural security. If, in the long course of Chinese feudal society, cultural security in a national security sense was still expressed mainly in terms of the dynastic cycle, a uniquely historical Chinese expression, then the Opium War fundamentally destroyed this rule of Chinese historical development, terminating this cyclical process of decline and revival, and thus the role of Chinese national security in the modern world changed the natural order of cyclical change. External cultural threats and invasion became a crucial force in forming the issues of national cultural security in China. This was a major watershed in the development of Chinese national security.

This clash of civilizations pulled back the curtain of modern Chinese history. China was pulled into the global system in the most humiliating way. In terms of the superiority of a culture, accepting the characteristics of a modern industrial civilization reflects the cultural rules of development from the most advanced productive force, which was the inevitable path for Chinese historical development. However, since this inevitable path ushered in the modern era and was unlike any other major historical progress, this was not something that emerged as an inherent expression and demand of Chinese culture, but was a coercive application of force from an external culture. This forced a modern transition in Chinese culture that began with a threat to state and national security. Chinese modernization began this difficult journey with national cultural security to build the dynamic structure of twentieth-century Chinese national cultural security.

After the mid-nineteenth century, the capitalist class continued the capitalist mode of production inherited from the sixteenth century to expand into global markets, giving rise to the first round of globalization.1 The unprecedented force of this wave of globalization rapidly led to a shift in global strategies: “With little psychological preparation and constraining mechanisms, human history entered a period of antagonism among civilizations and conflicts between traditions.”2 In this period, capitalist European countries quickly rose up and occupied global markets and the feudal Chinese empire’s lack of preparedness and policies of seclusion created a lot of friction. Because this

1 Fernand Braudel, Immanuel Wallerstein, Robert Keohane, and Joseph Nye all in their theories of the formation of the modern world system and globalization use 1500 as historic starting point.