

Collaborative Optimization of the Cultural Relationship between China and Russia under “the Belt and Road” Initiative

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Abstract: The development of cultural relations is of great significance to both China and Russia. It is conducive to consolidating the foundation of relationship between the two countries, setting an example of relations between different civilizations, promoting the implementation of “The Belt and Road” initiative, and bridging gaps and challenges in the relations between Russia and China. From the perspective of historical development, the changes of national development needs and cultural exchange subjects are main factors affecting the development of Sino-Russian cultural relations. “The Belt and Road” initiative can expand the space and contents of Sino-Russian cultural relations and can enhance the cooperativity of Sino-Russian cooperation in the cultural field. Under “The Belt and Road” initiative, Russia and China need to promote the further optimization of their cultural relations through concept collaboration, policy collaboration and subject collaboration.

1. Introduction

The relationship between China and Russia is the most important relationship between major countries in the world, especially in Eurasia. After years of cooperation and exploration, the bilateral relations between China and Russia are gradually stable and mature. The high level of political mutual trust between China and Russia provides a solid guarantee for the extensive cooperation in other fields. Cultural relations are an important dimension of Sino-Russian relations. People to people exchanges, strategic mutual trust as well as economic and trade cooperation are defined as three pillars in the development of China's foreign relations.[1] Actively expanding and deepening people to people cooperation plays an irreplaceable role in promoting the sustained and healthy development of the strategic cooperative partnership between China and Russia.[2] “The Belt and Road” is the most important international cooperation initiative in China. The cooperation is more abundant in contents, covering a wider range of fields and have more diversified participants. China has invested a lot of funds and resources, and established many cooperation mechanisms with countries along the belt and road. Therefore, “The Belt and Road” will surely produce important impacts on Sino-Russian cultural relations.

2. The Significance of Cultural Relationship between China and Russia

2.1 Consolidate the Foundation of Sino-Russian Relations

The cultural relations are an important part of the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership between China and Russia in the new era. On June 5, 2019, President Jinping Xi and Russian President Putin signed the joint statement of *People's Republic of China and Russian Federation on the Development of a Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership in the New Era*. The statement pointed out that, “Sino-Russian relations enter a new era and usher in new opportunities for greater development.” The relationship between China and Russia is upgraded to the “comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation in the new era”, emphasizing the need to “tap the potential of

bilateral relations more comprehensively and maintain the development momentum” and “taking the political cooperation, the security cooperation, the pragmatic cooperation, people to people exchanges and the international cooperation as key areas of the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership.”[3] This also means that now China-Russia relations have new development space on existing basis. Therefore, the consolidation of cultural relations is essential for the development of Sino Russian relations.

Cultural relations are an important supplement to the political mutual trust between China and Russia under the premise of non alignment. Non alignment means that China and Russia cannot fulfill their obligations of support each other as allies do. However, the history shows that forming alliance is not in line with the fundamental interests of two countries in the long run. To develop the friendly relations between China and Russian on the premise of non alignment requires us to strengthen cooperation in a broader field. The political mutual trust between China and Russia lacks the institutional guarantee of alliance. Therefore, based on the comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation under the condition of non alignment, the relationship “stronger than the alliance” requires cultural relations as the binder.

The new type of great power relations between China and Russia need to be consolidated and enriched. Great power relations have a decisive impact on world peace and stability. The traditional relations between great powers are characterized by “zero sum game”, “containment” and “confrontation”, which are not conducive to world peace and not in line with the interests of major countries. The relationship between China and Russia is a model of the new type of relationship between great powers in the world. The “four no” principles in Sino-Russian relations provide new norms for the development of Sino-Russian relations from the framework. The relations between China and Russia show the trend and state of all-round cooperation in various fields. [4] Therefore, China and Russia need to strengthen cooperation in the cultural field, consolidate existing achievements in the development of relations, and add more rich and meaningful contents to the new type of major country relations.

The shortcomings and challenges in Sino-Russian relations need to be bridged by people to people exchanges. China and Russia have a high level of political mutual trust. We have repeatedly reiterated that Sino-Russian relations are now in the best period in history. But the relation is by no means flawless; there are still shortcomings and challenges. For instance, Russia is difficult to adjust to China's rise and economic out-performance; its mentality is unbalanced. [5] The mutual recognition between the Chinese and Russian people is not enough; there is still a market for the “China Threat Theory” in Russia; the Russian society's preference for China declines. [6] Under the condition of the stable high-level political mutual trust between China and Russia, these problems are largely caused by insufficient exchanges and cooperation in the humanity field between the two countries. Therefore, China and Russia need to further strengthen exchanges and cooperation in the field of humanities, enhance mutual understanding at the social level, and reduce misunderstanding and misjudgment.

2.2 Set a Good Example of Relationship between Different Civilizations

China and Russia are not only political powers, but also cultural powers. In the world civilization pattern divided by Huntington, China and Russia are the core countries of Confucian civilization and orthodox civilization respectively. In this sense, the significance of Sino-Russian cultural relations is beyond the scope of the two countries, and even beyond the scope of regional and material senses. From the perspective of cultural attribute and actual contents, the heterogeneity of Chinese and Russian culture is far greater than the homogeneity. The “sub” components in Russian civilization mainly come from the grassland civilization of Mongolia and Central Asia and the Islamic civilization of Central and Western Asia. Although China and Russia have a long border, the cultural core areas of the two countries are far away from each other; people of the two countries have a sense of distance in cultural psychology. In today's world, respecting cultural diversity and promoting friendly relations between different civilizations have been affirmed by most countries and international organizations, but the differences in civilizations have obvious influence on practical relations. To realize the friendly relationship between different civilizations, countries need to

explore and practice constantly in their exchanges. Therefore, the cultural relationship between China and Russia represents the interaction between two different civilizations. The principles, concepts and methods embodied in the cultural relations between China and Russia can play a typical exemplary role in the interaction between different civilizations.

2.3 Necessary Conditions to Promote “the Belt and Road” Initiative

“The Belt and Road” is the most important international cooperation initiative of China. The main body of participation involves pluralistic forces from the top government to enterprises, and from social groups to citizens. “People-to-people connectivity” is an important direction for the development of “The Belt and Road”. People-to-people and cultural exchanges cover a wide range of subjects, which is the main way to bring people together between China and other countries. Without extensive people-to-people and cultural exchanges, China's aspiration for peaceful development, and the concept of shared development will not be truly rooted in the hearts of the people; the negative influences of concepts such as the “China threat theory” will always exist. Therefore, the development of cultural relations between China and Russia is the inevitable choice to promote “The Belt and Road” initiative.

3. Factors Influencing the Changes of Cultural Relationship between China and Russia

According to the historical process of cultural exchange and cooperation between China and Russia, the cultural relations between the two countries have roughly gone through five stages. First is the limited contact and understanding from the 17th century to “October Revolution” in 1917; second is the unbalanced exchange and learning from 1917 to 1949. The third stage witnessed the situation changes from “learning from the Soviet Union” to the overall deterioration from 1949 to 1980s. The fourth stage is featured by gradual recovery and normalization, which lasts from the mid-1980s to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The fifth stage is the all-round development stage after 1991. Due to differences in historical development trend, the cultural relations between China and Russia present different characteristics in different histories. The main influencing factors are as follows.

3.1 Changes in the Development Needs of Countries

In the historical process of the development of Sino-Russian cultural relations, the national and social development needs of two countries are the main factors affecting the cultural relations. From the 17th century to the October Revolution, cultural exchanges between China and Russia were very limited. Russia was more interested in classical Chinese culture and art, as well as porcelain and silk. However, China's political system as well as social and cultural development at that time could not provide any meaningful reference for Russia's goal of enriching the country and strengthening the army. In the same way, when China tried to reform and become stronger, Russia was backward relative to Europe and the United States. Due to Russia's wanton occupation of Chinese territory in the North, China did not take Russia as the learning object. The cultural exchange between China and Russia remained at the level of basic understanding, mutual translation and exchange of utensils.

At that time, China learned from Europe, United States and other countries, but failed to get rid of the backwardness. The outbreak of the October Revolution brought Marxism to China; the goodwill released by the Soviet Union also won China's favor. The achievements of Soviet Union's national construction attracted a large number of Chinese people to study and opened the historical process of large-scale cultural exchanges between China and the Soviet Union. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, China lacked experience in socialist construction. As the first country which established a socialist system and successfully completed industrialization in the world, the Soviet Union naturally became the object of learning and imitation by new China. Due to the proximity of ideology and the establishment of the alliance, the whole China set off an upsurge of learning from the Soviet Union in an all-round way. China's socialist cultural construction was also deeply influenced by the Soviet Union. The cultural exchange between China and the Soviet Union

reached an unprecedented depth and breadth, and formed a cultural relationship mode dominated by the government, based on administrative plans and instructions, and widely participated by the whole society. With the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations and the limitation of the Soviet model, the cultural exchanges between China and the Soviet Union also fell into a low tide. In the face of development dilemma, China embarked on the road of reform and opening up. However, the rigid planned economic system of the Soviet Union and reform under Gorbachev's "new thinking" in the later stage could not meet the needs of China's national development and could not be learned and imitated by China. Therefore, although the cultural exchanges between China and the Soviet Union restored to a certain extent after the normalization of bilateral relations, the cultural relationship could not reach the depth during the period of Sino-Soviet due to changes in political relations and national development needs .

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, through the joint efforts of the two countries, Sino-Russian relations established the basic framework of non alignment, non confrontation, non targeting the third party and non ideology, and developed into a "comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation in the new era". Both Russia and China are committed to national development and external cooperation. China puts forward the "Belt and Road" initiative; Russia promotes the Eurasian economic union and reaches consensus on the complementation and cooperation of the Belt and Road union. The cultural relations between two countries enjoy the favorable development environment and historic opportunities.

3.2 Changes of the Construction Subject of Sino-Russian Cultural Relations

In the development of Sino-Russian cultural relations, participants change from the elite to masses, and from single to multiple parties. The early cultural exchanges between China and Russia were limited to a small number of specific groups, such as diplomatic missions, missionaries and cultural scholars. With the expansion of Sino-Russian exchanges, especially the establishment of the Sino-Soviet friendly alliance, the cultural exchanges between China and the Soviet Union extended to all fields of society. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, China and Russia established a comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation. The expansion of cooperation fields leads to more and more extensive participants of cultural cooperation. Besides the government, multinational enterprises, social organizations and individual citizens can also participate in cultural exchanges in various ways, making the subjects of Sino Russian cultural relations more complex and diversified.

4. Collaborative Governance: the Path to Optimize the Cultural Relationship between China and Russia under "the Belt and Road" Initiative

The current political relations and national development of China and Russia provide a good basic environment for the development of cultural relations between the two countries. From the historical development experience of cultural relations between China and Russia, the good development of cultural relations needs to strengthen the cooperation between the two countries and jointly govern problems in cultural cooperation. Under the impetus of "The Belt and Road" and the establishment of a comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation between China and Russia, the collaborative governance can provide a feasible path for the further optimization of Sino-Russian cultural relations. Through concept collaboration, we can expand the consensus of Sino-Russian cultural relations. Through policy collaboration, we can provide a more convenient system environment and conditions for the development of Sino-Russian cultural exchanges. Through subject collaboration, we can better implement the high-level consensus on cultural cooperation between China and Russia, and enrich the social foundation of Sino-Russian cultural relations.

4.1 Concept Collaboration

Concept collaboration refers to the similarity between China and Russia in developing bilateral cultural relations and their own cultural development direction and goals. Russia formulates a cultural power strategy to revitalize its position as a great power, while China emphasizes cultural

self-confidence, cultural construction and enhancing cultural soft power. The Russian Federation Government issued the *National Cultural Policy Strategy of the Russian Federation before 2030*, which included the goal of “openness and mutual integration with other ethnic groups and cultures”, as well as “the task of expanding and supporting cultural and human ties around the world”. *The 2019 Beijing Consensus of the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations* issued in May 2019 emphasizes that different civilizations should respect, tolerate and learn from each other. We should surpass the superiority of civilization by diverse coexistence, transcend the clash of civilizations by harmonious coexistence, transcend the estrangement of civilization by blending and sharing, and transcend the solidification of civilization with prosperity and progress.[7] The similar concept of foreign cultural exchange is the basic premise for the development of cultural relations between China and Russia.

4.2 Policy Collaboration

On the premise that China and Russia have reached a certain consensus on cultural development, China and Russia need to maintain the close cooperation in policy and implement the consensus in the cultural field. “The Belt and Road” initiative has provided more opportunities for Sino-Russian cultural exchanges. For funds, cooperation platforms and exchange institutions invested by China and Russia for cultural and people-to-people exchanges, they need the two sides to give necessary cooperation and support. For each others’ policies in the cultural exchange, they need to fully communicate and discuss specific plans and implement methods and safeguard measures, so as to ensure that all aspects of exchanges between the two countries can go on smoothly.

4.3 Subject Collaboration

The participants of cultural relations have the characteristic of diversification, including the government, cultural groups, enterprises, individual citizens, and special institutions for cultural exchange, such as Confucius Institutes and Russian cultural centers. Each subject not only has its own unique function, but also has certain limitations. They play different roles in people to people exchanges and jointly determine the development level of Sino-Russian cultural relations. At present, the Chinese and Russian governments maintain good communication and coordination, but the collaboration of other subjects in the communication is still insufficient. In particular, how to complement the advantages of different subjects and how to form an organic whole of people to people exchanges are still problems need to be explored and developed in practice.

5. Summary

Through analyzing the historical development process and characteristics of the cultural relations between Russia and Russia, and combing with the “Belt and Road” initiative, this paper answers following questions. What is the significance of promoting the development of the cultural relations between Russia and Russia? What are the characteristics of the cultural relations between Russia and Russia? How to realize the optimization of the cultural relations between Russia and Russia?

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