Academic Journal of Management and Social Sciences
ISSN: 2958-4396 | Vol. 15, No. 2, 2026

A Study on the Construction of Chinese Cultural Subjectivity in the Context of Contemporary Cultural Transformation

Yutong Li, Yanyan Wu

School of Marxism Studies, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, Zhejiang, 321000, China

Abstract: The context of accelerating contemporary cultural transformations, the modes of cultural operation, structures of cultural identity, and mechanisms of meaning production have undergone profound adjustments, placing higher demands on the self-conscious development of culture. Chinese cultural subjectivity is therefore no longer understood as a fixed cultural attribute, but as a continuously generated cultural state shaped through the interaction between history and reality. Based on the fundamental characteristics of contemporary cultural change and the historical background of the theoretical self-awareness of cultural subjectivity, the philosophical connotation of cultural subjectivity is clarified, followed by an analysis of the internal resources and structural tensions involved in the formation of Chinese cultural subjectivity. On this basis, the construction path of Chinese cultural subjectivity under contemporary conditions is systematically examined from the perspectives of reshaping cultural understanding, maintaining a conscious stance in cultural exchanges, and sustaining reflective mechanisms, aiming to provide an analytically robust perspective for grasping the theoretical implications and practical development of Chinese cultural subjectivity in the new era.

Keywords: Cultural Transformation; Culture; Chinese Cultural Subjectivity.

1. Introduction

From the perspective of civilizational development, the contemporary expression of Chinese cultural subjectivity is primarily manifested in the civilizational self-representation of the Chinese nation in the process of modernization. The construction of cultural subjectivity is regarded as a key task in advancing the development of a culturally strong nation in the new era, while consolidating cultural subjectivity and building a modern Chinese civilization constitute fundamental issues concerning the direction of development in the process of Chinese modernization.

However, at the theoretical level, cultural subjectivity is neither a given fact nor reducible to an emotional identification with traditional culture. Against the backdrop of accelerating contemporary cultural transformations, globalization, technological media, and social structural changes have profoundly reshaped the mechanisms of cultural production and the foundations of identity. As a result, how cultural subjectivity is formed, maintained, and rendered self-conscious has become a pressing theoretical issue that demands systematic reflection.

2. Theoretical Background and Problem Orientation of Chinese Cultural Subjectivity in the Context of Cultural Transformation

2.1. Fundamental Characteristics of Contemporary Cultural Transformation

Contemporary culture is undergoing continuous and profound transformations driven by multiple factors, including deepening globalization, the extensive intervention of technological media, and ongoing social structural changes. Compared with traditional cultural forms characterized by stable transmission, contemporary culture exhibits greater openness, fluidity, and uncertainty, leading to significant shifts in both its modes of existence and interpretation.

First, globalization has intensified interactions among different cultures, placing culture within a framework of cross-cultural comparison. While this broadens horizons of understanding, it also disrupts established orders of meaning, prompting a shift in cultural self-understanding from what was once taken for granted to a more reflective mode. Second, the development of technological media has transformed the ways in which culture is produced and disseminated. Information now circulates at high speed and in fragmented forms. Although this enhances cultural vitality, it also weakens, to some extent, the coherence and depth of meaning structures. Third, transformations in social structure and increased individual mobility have shifted cultural identity from a singular and stable form to a pluralistic and dynamic one. Individuals increasingly rely on active selection and interpretation in forming their cultural identities.

Overall, contemporary culture has shifted from a relatively stable mode of inheritance to an ongoing process of generation and adjustment. In this context, whether culture possesses the capacity for self-understanding and self-reflection has become a key criterion for evaluating its subjectivity, and also provides a realistic foundation for further exploration of Chinese cultural subjectivity.

2.2. The Historical Context of the Theoretical Self-Awareness of Cultural Subjectivity

The acceleration of contemporary cultural transformations has fundamentally altered the conditions under which culture develops. In the context of deepening globalization, the comprehensive integration of technological media into social life, and the continuous adjustment of value structures, culture no longer operates merely through the natural continuation of tradition. Instead, it increasingly manifests as a practical

process that requires conscious orientation and meaning-making. “Cultural subjectivity does not imply that culture itself develops an independent consciousness apart from human beings; rather, it refers to the self-awareness and subjective agency formed by human subjects within a broad cultural space.[1]”

On the one hand, the deepening of cross-cultural exchanges situates the construction of cultural meaning within a comparative horizon. Without a clear sense of self-understanding, cultures may easily lose direction in interaction, making it necessary to establish a firm cultural stance through subjectivity.

On the other hand, technological media have driven cultural dissemination toward fragmentation, making it difficult for coherent meaning structures to form naturally. Emotional identification alone is no longer sufficient to sustain cultural development; instead, subjectivity is needed to strengthen capacities for self-understanding and integration.

At a deeper level, the process of modernization places higher demands on cultural self-consciousness. How culture can achieve innovative development while inheriting tradition has become a central issue. The theoretical self-awareness of cultural subjectivity is precisely a response to this historical process. Therefore, the concept of cultural subjectivity emerges from changing historical conditions and reflects an active theoretical effort to establish developmental orientation and internal motivation within a complex cultural environment.

2.3. Understanding Chinese Cultural Subjectivity as a Constructive Problem

In the context of contemporary cultural transformation, it is necessary to redefine the theoretical positioning of Chinese cultural subjectivity. Previous understandings that regarded subjectivity as a pre-existing entity emphasizing continuity and stability are no longer sufficient to explain reality under conditions of profound cultural change. When culture no longer relies on a single tradition or fixed framework to sustain meaning, subjectivity cannot emerge naturally.

How culture forms self-understanding, makes judgments, and maintains continuity within a pluralistic environment must be realized through ongoing practice and reflection. Therefore, subjectivity should no longer be seen as a given attribute, but rather as a state continuously generated and sustained in reality.

Viewing subjectivity as a constructive problem does not deny the historical foundation of Chinese culture; instead, it emphasizes that such foundations must be reinterpreted and activated within contemporary contexts in order to be transformed into real cultural forces. Otherwise, subjectivity risks remaining at a merely symbolic level.

At the same time, this perspective avoids equating subjectivity with a closed form of self-affirmation. Instead, it highlights the formation of a self-conscious stance through interaction and comparison. Thus, the construction of Chinese cultural subjectivity is an ongoing process, manifested in the capacity of culture to continuously engage in self-understanding and self-adjustment in response to real-world issues, rather than a fixed and unchanging conclusion.

3. The Philosophical Connotations and Constructive Foundations of Chinese Cultural Subjectivity

3.1. The Philosophical Connotations of Cultural Subjectivity

Before discussing the construction of Chinese cultural subjectivity, it is necessary to clarify, at the philosophical level, the concept of “cultural subjectivity” itself. In philosophical terms, subjectivity does not refer to culture as an isolated entity; rather, it emphasizes the capacity of culture to develop self-understanding and self-reflection under concrete historical and social conditions. “Cultural subjectivity can thus be understood as the manifestation of human beings as the subjects of cultural existence.[2]”Culture is not a passive container of tradition, but a dynamic process in which meanings and value orientations are continuously generated through the interaction between historical continuity and present practice.

Furthermore, cultural subjectivity should not be regarded as a static attribute, but as an ongoing process of formation. It does not aim at establishing a final or fixed conclusion; instead, it unfolds through continuous responses to real-world problems. Whether a culture possesses subjectivity does not depend on the length of its history or the uniqueness of its content, but on its ability to examine and adjust its own conceptual frameworks and modes of understanding in response to changing conditions.

As Chen Xianda has argued, “throughout thousands of years of history, despite the coexistence of multiple political regimes and periods in which different ethnic groups held ruling positions, China has consistently maintained its existence as an independent state. The nation serves as the subject of culture; as long as the state endures and the nation remains unified, culture does not lose its foundation.[3]” It is precisely through historical accumulation that the vitality of Chinese culture has been continuously strengthened and its subjectivity consolidated, demonstrating its remarkable resilience.

In this sense, subjectivity is no longer understood in terms of “what culture is,” but rather in terms of “how culture operates” and “how it responds to reality.” This philosophical premise provides a necessary theoretical starting point for further discussion of the foundations of Chinese cultural subjectivity, and lays the conceptual groundwork for analyzing its internal resources and practical pathways in subsequent sections.

3.2. The Internal Resources of Chinese Cultural Subjectivity

First, Chinese culture exhibits a distinct orientation toward practice. Cultural meanings are not primarily established through abstract theoretical constructions, but are gradually formed within concrete social life. In this process, subjectivity is not expressed as a detached declaration of selfhood, but is continuously tested and revised through practice.

Second, over the course of its long historical development, Chinese culture has formed a mode of understanding that emphasizes holistic order and relational structures. Individuals are not treated as isolated entities, but are understood within the broader contexts of family, society, and overarching social order. For example, the intellectual flourishing during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States

periods—often referred to as the "Hundred Schools of Thought"—demonstrated a high level of cultural self-awareness. Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism, Legalism, and other schools actively engaged in philosophical debates on social, ethical, and moral issues, reflecting a vibrant and pluralistic intellectual tradition.

In addition, Chinese culture possesses rich internal resources for reflection. Concepts such as self-examination, self-cultivation, reflect an enduring emphasis on internal regulation and self-adjustment. This form of reflection does not primarily take the form of external critique, but rather unfolds as an ongoing process of internal correction, enabling culture to continuously recalibrate its understandings and practices over time.

"As historical experience indicates, the cultural forms created by the Chinese nation in each period have been grounded in the practical needs of production and daily life. As these needs evolve, both the content and forms of Chinese culture have undergone continuous transformation. This process not only enriches and develops Chinese culture, but also further highlights its subjectivity.[4]" How to activate these internal resources under conditions of contemporary cultural transformation and transform them into effective forces of cultural subjectivity remains a key issue for further exploration.

3.3. Internal Tensions in the Construction of Chinese Cultural Subjectivity

The tension between traditional continuity and modern transformation constitutes an unavoidable issue in the construction of Chinese cultural subjectivity. Over the course of its long historical development, Chinese culture has formed relatively stable value structures and modes of understanding, which provide an important foundation for the generation of cultural subjectivity. In the context of deepening multicultural interaction, cultural subjectivity cannot be sustained through a closed or defensive posture. Openness and exchange help broaden the horizons of cultural understanding and provide opportunities to test the rationality and vitality of one's own cultural framework. However, if openness lacks a conscious framework of self-understanding, subjectivity may be diluted or even dissolved in the process of interaction.

Therefore, the construction of cultural subjectivity does not involve a simple choice between "openness" and "defensiveness." Rather, it requires a continuous process of clarifying one's own position through engagement, and forming a stable and self-conscious cultural identity through comparison and interaction.

4. Pathways for Constructing Chinese Cultural Subjectivity in the Context of Contemporary Cultural Transformation

4.1. Reshaping Modes of Cultural Understanding in the Process of Modern Transformation

If cultural subjectivity is understood merely as the mechanical inheritance of existing cultural content, culture is likely to remain at the level of symbolic representation and formalization. "The construction of Chinese cultural subjectivity requires a balanced engagement between tradition and modernity.[5]" When traditional concepts are detached from concrete life contexts, they become increasingly incapable of responding to real-world issues, and their explanatory power and practical relevance are correspondingly weakened.

In the context of deepening modernization, cultural subjectivity can sustain itself only when it is capable of engaging with lived reality and addressing contemporary concerns. "In this process, the role of the people as cultural subjects should be fully recognized, including folk artists, cultural scholars, and ordinary individuals, all of whom contribute to the transmission and innovation of Chinese culture.[6]"

More fundamentally, the construction of subjectivity is manifested in the transformation of modes of cultural understanding. Traditional cultural resources do not inherently possess contemporary significance; rather, they must be reinterpreted and revitalized within specific historical and social contexts in order to become effective cultural forces.

4.2. Maintaining an Open yet Self-Conscious Cultural Stance in Cultural Exchange

With the deepening of cross-regional and cross-cultural interactions, Chinese culture is inevitably situated within a dynamic environment of continuous engagement with diverse cultural forms. "In a multicultural context, cultural entities engage in civilizational dialogue on equal footing. They actively assimilate beneficial elements from other cultures while steadfastly preserving their cultural identity. Through mutual exchange and learning, they maintain their distinctive characteristics, achieving self-renewal and sustainable development of Chinese cultural subjectivity.[7]" In such a context, cultural meaning is no longer primarily confirmed through internal continuity, but unfolds through ongoing processes of exchange, comparison, and response. This reality renders the question of cultural subjectivity more directly relevant to practical concerns.

In the context of intensified cultural exchange, if subjectivity is understood in a closed manner, it may easily devolve into a defensive cultural stance. Cultural exchange should not be viewed merely as a process of external influence, but as a critical arena for deepening cultural self-understanding. Subjectivity is not consolidated through isolation, but is gradually formed through interaction.

At the same time, a self-conscious cultural stance requires a clear awareness of one's own internal logic of cultural operation. "Only when a nation possesses a high degree of cultural self-awareness can it strengthen its autonomous capabilities and dominant position in the modern transformation, cultural selection, and innovative development of its national culture.[8]" Cultural subjectivity does not depend on the simple rejection of external influences; rather, it is reflected in a conscious grasp of one's own modes of understanding. Only on the basis of a clear comprehension of its own interpretive framework can cultural exchange become a condition for the generation of subjectivity, rather than a cause of its dissolution.

4.3. Sustaining the Continuous Generation of Cultural Subjectivity through Reflective Mechanisms

In the context of accelerating contemporary cultural transformations, the construction of Chinese cultural subjectivity cannot be accomplished through a one-time

theoretical formulation or value declaration. The function of reflective mechanisms does not lie in negating existing cultural resources, but in enabling culture to continuously examine its own modes of understanding.

When real-world conditions change, whether existing concepts still retain explanatory power, and how culture should adjust its value judgments, must be reassessed through reflection. In this sense, subjectivity manifests as an ongoing concern with the rationality of cultural self-understanding, rather than a rigid adherence to predetermined conclusions.

A culture lacking reflective mechanisms is prone to reproducing established patterns of understanding through inertia, causing subjectivity to gradually become formalistic. By contrast, the sustained operation of reflective mechanisms keeps cultural understanding open and dynamic. Culture no longer treats any particular interpretation as final, but continuously revises itself through processes of problematization.

Through reflection, culture is able to identify which concepts require reinterpretation and which modes of understanding have become inadequate in addressing contemporary experience. In this way, continuity is maintained through ongoing adjustment. Cultural subjectivity is thus generated through this process of continuous revision, rather than through a one-sided pursuit of stability.

5. Summary

In the context of accelerating contemporary cultural transformation, Chinese cultural subjectivity is no longer a presupposed premise, but has become a theoretical issue that requires systematic interpretation and construction. Changes in the cultural environment have challenged existing modes of cultural understanding, structures of identity, and frameworks of value judgment, prompting culture to reconsider its own rationality and continuity amid ongoing transformation.

The prominence of the question of subjectivity does not stem from cultural rupture, but from shifts in the conditions under which culture operates. As established structures of meaning are disrupted, whether culture possesses the capacity for self-understanding and self-regulation becomes a key criterion for evaluating its subjectivity. Accordingly, subjectivity is no longer reducible to the simple inheritance of tradition, but is manifested in the capacity for continuous reflection and adjustment under concrete conditions.

At the philosophical level, cultural subjectivity is neither self-sufficient nor inherently superior, but should be understood as a dynamic process of ongoing formation. The practice-oriented orientation and reflective traditions embedded in Chinese culture provide an important foundation for subjectivity; however, these resources must be activated within contemporary contexts in order to be transformed into effective cultural forces.

The construction of subjectivity is invariably accompanied by tensions between tradition and modernity, openness and identity, as well as reflection and stability. These tensions constitute the internal conditions for its emergence. Therefore, in the context of contemporary cultural transformation, the formation of Chinese cultural subjectivity depends on reshaping modes of cultural understanding, maintaining an open yet self-conscious stance in cultural exchange, and sustaining stable mechanisms of reflection. Cultural subjectivity is not a fixed outcome, but a process that continuously unfolds through ongoing engagement with reality and persistent self-examination.

References

[1] Xiao Guiqing, Liu Shichen. The Principles and Paths of Consolidating the Subjectivity of Chinese Culture in the New Era. Studies in Ideological Education, 2025, (10)58-66.

[2] Zou Guangwen. Back to Our Own National Cultural Subjectivity. Jilin University Journal of Social Sciences, 2024, 64(03): 23-31+234.

[3] Chen Xianda. Tradition and Modernity in Cultural Confidence. Journal of Red Culture, 2018, (03): 107-109.

[4] Du Shiju, Liu Wenfeng. A Multi-dimensional Philosophical Interpretation of the Subjectivity of Chinese Culture. Thought Front, 2025, 51(06): 98-107.

[5] Wu Yunzhi, Xu Jiacheng. The Interpretation and Construction of the Subjectivity of Chinese Culture. Ningxia Social Sciences, 2025, (01): 23-30.

[6] Wang Yuhua, Yue Xinxin. A Three-dimensional Exploration of the Construction of the Subjectivity of Chinese Culture. Journal of Culture, 2025, (09): 92-95.

[7] Jin Yuanbo, Fan Shide. The Logical Generation of the Subjectivity of Chinese Culture in the New Era and the Construction of Its Practical Path. Academic Exploration, 2025, (12): 33-39.

[8] Lu Jianhua, Yan Xiaofeng. A Theoretical Analysis of the “Two Integrations” in Consolidating Cultural Subjectivity. Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition), 2024, 45(07): 179-185.