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# The Unique Generation Mechanism of Chinese Cultural Subjectivity from the Perspective of Civilization Comparison

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**Abstract:** In the context of globalization, civilization comparison has become an important methodology for studying cultural subjectivity. This article constructs a framework for analyzing the morphology of civilization, revealing the unique generation mechanism of Chinese cultural subjectivity in the evolution of civilization. The study points out that Chinese path to modernization has broken through the "Western centric" narrative, and achieved the symbiosis of traditional foundation maintenance and modern transformation through the triple logic of civilization continuity, theoretical innovation and symbiotic modernity. This mechanism not only provides cultural and philosophical support for understanding Chinese path to modernization, but also provides a "generative co construction" Chinese program for global civilization mutual learning.

**Keywords:** Cultural Subjectivity, Civilization Morphology, Symbiotic Modernity, Two Combinations, Civilization Iteration.

## 1. Introduction

In the process of contemporary globalization, civilizational comparison has become the core methodology in the study of cultural subjectivity. The Western modernization narrative has long dominated the framework for global cultural understanding, leading to the systematic marginalization of non-Western civilizational subjectivity. The practice of Chinese-style modernization raises a fundamental question: Can civilization break free from the path dependence of "Western centrism" and achieve modernization transformation through its own logic? This proposition not only concerns the legitimacy of China's path but also involves the survival of human civilization diversity.

While nations like Japan, South Korea, and India have achieved economic success through modernization, their cultural identities remain structurally fractured. Japan grapples with a traditional rupture as it moves from Asia to Europe, South Korea faces identity confusion in its "Korean Wave" cultural exports, and India remains mired in cultural fragmentation under colonial influences. Domestic research predominantly focuses on the internal logic of cultural identity, lacking systematic comparative analysis across civilizations.[1] Particularly noteworthy is the neglect of the tripartite relationship between "cultural continuity, modern transformative power, and global contribution."

This paper reveals the unique generative mechanism of China's cultural subjectivity in civilizational evolution through the perspective of civilizational morphology. Theoretically, it breaks through the linear narrative of "Western-centric theory"; practically, it provides cultural and philosophical support for Chinese-style modernization. The study adopts Marxist cultural perspective as the core methodology, integrates China's philosophical view of "harmony in diversity" regarding civilization, and constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework of "traditional-modern-global".

## 2. A Typological Framework for Cultural Subjectivity Construction

### 2.1. Civilization Morphology and Cultural Subjectivity Logic

Civilizational morphology views civilization as a dynamic system with internal structure and logic, analyzed through its historical development, spiritual structure, and value system. Within this framework, cultural subjectivity is not merely an abstract will but a core mechanism that sustains a civilization's identity and enables transformation amid external change.

In Chinese civilization, cultural subjectivity is deeply rooted in its historical structure. The interaction between political unity and cultural identity since the Pre-Qin era has shaped a cohesive framework supported by Confucian ethics, which provide spiritual stability while allowing adaptive evolution. This adaptability, guided by a flexible philosophical outlook, enables tradition to remain functionally relevant across time.

In modern contexts, cultural subjectivity expresses itself through the creative transformation of traditional values. Socialist core values, for example, reorganize Confucian principles like benevolence and integrity into modern frameworks of law and morality, reinforcing social cohesion and governance.

It also manifests as reflexive practice. Since reform and opening-up, China has demonstrated a capacity for institutional and ideological adjustment without abandoning its cultural foundations. This reflexivity prevents both rigid traditionalism and wholesale imitation of Western models[2].

### 2.2. The "Resilience Mechanism" of Cultural Continuity

Cultural resilience is the capacity of a civilization to maintain identity and structural continuity while adapting to external change. In the face of globalization and modernization, this resilience enables civilizations to absorb

outside influences and integrate them into their own developmental logic.

Chinese civilization has demonstrated resilience through the adaptive renewal of ideas and institutional forms. Concepts like “harmony without uniformity” offer a stable framework for cultural coexistence in diverse contexts. Similarly, the shift from the imperial examination system to modern civil service exams reflects institutional continuity despite formal transformation, preserving values such as merit and fairness.

At the value level, traditional ideas like “the world belongs to all” have been reinterpreted within frameworks such as socialist democracy, enabling ethical continuity in modern governance. This renewal is not symbolic repetition, but a functional recoding aligned with current political and social needs[3].

In crisis contexts, such as pandemic response, principles like “putting life first” reflect long-standing people-centered ethics rooted in tradition and adapted into modern governance. Such responses illustrate how resilience allows for active internal integration and external engagement[4].

Thus, cultural resilience is not passive preservation, but an active capacity for reorganization and regeneration. It underpins Chinese civilization’s gradual evolution across time and scale, securing the cultural subjectivity needed for sustainable development.

# 3. Experiences and Mistakes in the Construction of Cultural Subjectivity in Other Countries

## 3.1. Japan: "Leaving Asia for Europe" and the Cost of Traditional Disruption

Japan's rapid modernization through the Meiji Restoration demonstrated strong technological and institutional adaptation but was based on a strategy of comprehensive Westernization rather than continuity with local cultural traditions. Fukuzawa Yukichi's “Leaving Asia” doctrine reflected a rejection of East Asian cultural ties in favor of Western models, accelerating industrial and military development but causing deep cultural dislocation.

Traditional ideologies like Confucianism and Buddhism were suppressed, and Western rationalism fully adopted. This replacement approach created a modernization path reliant on external models, weakening ethical structures and trust within society. Post-war constitutional reforms further entrenched foreign political values, deepening the divide between tradition and modernity.

The consequences of this rupture are evident in contemporary Japanese society. In the “low-desire society” era, declining motivation, weakened identity, and social stagnation reflect a deeper loss of cultural subjectivity. Without a sustaining value framework, modernization has struggled to provide long-term cohesion or meaning.

Japan’s experience shows that without preserving cultural continuity, modernization risks becoming structurally superficial. Technological progress alone cannot ensure civilizational self-integration or resilience. Japan’s imitative path lacked internal cultural participation, leading to limited capacity for identity reconstruction and social renewal.

## 3.2. South Korea: The "K-wave" Cultural Export and Floating Identity

Since the late 20th century, South Korea’s K-wave has gained global popularity through state-supported cultural exports in music, film, and television. While this strategy has enhanced soft power and cultural appeal, it relies heavily on commercialization and media packaging, resulting in cultural content that is symbolic and consumerist, with weak value depth and internal coherence.

Government-led policies have built transnational dissemination platforms, but market-driven production has overshadowed ideological substance. K-pop, in particular, emphasizes standardized imagery and emotional stimulation over historical or ethical narratives, reducing traditional elements to superficial symbols. As a result, the cultural identity conveyed is fragmented and lacks sustained resonance.

Deeper cultural dimensions-like Confucian ethics or national memory-are largely absent in core K-wave expressions. Cultural output caters to global trends rather than building a coherent civilizational narrative, leading to misinterpretation and identity detachment, both abroad and domestically. Within South Korea, the younger generation shows signs of alienation from traditional values, reflecting a broader loss of cultural subjectivity.

## 3.3. India: Cultural Fragmentation under the "Colonial Shadow"

India’s modern nation-building has been shaped by its colonial legacy, leading to lasting contradictions in its cultural subjectivity. Post-independence, India adopted Western-style institutions and English as tools for development, but this also fragmented its cultural identity. Colonial rule reshaped India’s administrative, educational, and intellectual systems, making it difficult to reconcile tradition with modernity and national culture with colonial inheritance.

Linguistically, English retained elite status, enhancing governance efficiency but marginalizing local languages. This created structural inequality in education, political participation, and cultural expression, contributing to divisions between class identity and cultural belonging.

Religious traditions, rather than fading, became politically instrumentalized. Tensions among Hinduism, Islam, and others, coupled with the politicization of religion, have deepened internal fragmentation. Despite formal secularism, cultural forces remain divided from modern national ideals, making social integration difficult.

India’s cultural subjectivity is further weakened by reliance on external narratives. Western frameworks dominate global perceptions of Indian civilization, while India itself lacks a coherent system of self-expression. This dependency has hindered the internal consolidation of cultural identity.

# 4. The Unique Path of Chinese Cultural Subjectivity

## 4.1. The Co-construction Logic of Civilizational Continuity and Modernization

A key feature of Chinese civilization is its historical continuity, sustained by mechanisms that ensure stable cultural inheritance. Central to this is the unified writing system, whose ideographic nature enables communication

across dialects and supports cohesive cultural identity and value transmission across time and space.

Confucian ethical norms, especially the "Five Constant Virtues," have long underpinned social and political order. These norms have evolved with changing times, maintaining relevance through their integration into modern education, law, and public ethics, balancing individual and collective, tradition and modernity[5].

Unified historical memory, shaped by dynastic narratives, reinforces cognitive and institutional awareness of national integration. This logic persists in modern governance, seen in development strategies that reflect the enduring balance between unity and diversity.

China's modernization follows a pattern of re-encoding tradition. Rather than rejecting the past, it selectively activates and reshapes traditional elements-such as transforming "xiaokang society" from classical poetry into modern policy goals-creating a value system rooted in local culture, not imported models[6].

This co-constructive logic reveals a modern path grounded in cultural autonomy. Tradition serves not as an obstacle but as a resource, sustaining identity and enhancing institutional legitimacy. Through this adaptive renewal, Chinese civilization achieves not just material modernization but civilizational transformation.

### 4.2. The Practical Efficacy of the "Two Combinations" in Civilizational Iteration

China's modernization is not based on rejecting tradition, but on the mutual reinforcement of tradition and modernity through the "Two Combinations": integrating Marxism with China's specific realities and with its fine traditional culture. These combinations guide both theoretical construction and practical evolution, allowing cultural subjectivity to regenerate through ongoing adjustment and integration.

Theoretically, this approach avoids copying Western models, instead rooting modernization in China's historical experience and cultural tradition. Concepts like "common prosperity" blend Marxist concerns for equity with Confucian ideals of "Great Harmony," forming a localized theoretical system that strengthens institutional legitimacy and cultural identity[7].

Practically, the "Two Combinations" are embodied across institutional, ideological, and cultural dimensions. The socialist market economy balances planning and market forces, reflecting traditional governance ideas. Core socialist values incorporate ethical traditions, while education on the "Four Histories" links national development with historical consciousness, reinforcing both institutional trust and cultural belonging[8].

Philosophically, this integration generates new frameworks by combining traditional thought with modern challenges. For example, the idea that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" merges Taoist ecological wisdom with sustainable development, forming innovative policy logic.

### 4.3. "Symbiotic Modernity" as a Philosophical Proposition of the Chinese Model

China's modernization departs from the linear model of Western modernity, instead forming a symbiotic modernity rooted in diversity, interactivity, and civilizational self-generation. This model is not value relativism or passive tolerance, but a culturally grounded framework that integrates complexity while offering space for contemporary cultural subjectivity.

Philosophically, it reflects an ethics of intersubjectivity—emphasizing coexistence and respect for difference. The traditional ideal of "harmony without uniformity" guides not only cultural attitudes but also practical initiatives like the Belt and Road, which prioritize cooperation over ideological unification[9].

Historically, symbiotic modernity draws on cultural memory to stabilize subjectivity. Education on the "Four Histories" strengthens national identity and enables individuals to locate themselves culturally within global exchanges. This historical consciousness supports China's capacity for dialogue and cohesion.

Practically, symbiotic modernity informs development ethics. China's poverty alleviation efforts reflect not only material goals but also attention to dignity, community, and cultural continuity, offering globally relevant development models shaped by multiple value systems[10].

As a cultural expression of Chinese-style modernization, symbiotic modernity does not reject Western models but presents an alternative rooted in local traditions and open to global dialogue. It fosters renewal through coexistence and provides new theoretical and practical directions for late-developing countries exploring their own modernization paths.

## 5. Conclusion

China's cultural subjectivity is a lasting civilizational force shaped by internal adaptation and external interaction. In a world still shaped by Western modernity, civilizational comparison reveals that successful modernization depends on a civilization's ability to integrate tradition with modern structures through its own logic.

China's path, rooted in civilizational continuity, avoids cultural rupture by reinterpreting tradition. The "Two Combinations" offer frameworks for transforming cultural resources and shaping institutional development. Civilizational morphology shows this subjectivity as dynamic and regenerative.

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