

Preface F:

Age-old ideas in modern context

This book would focus on aspects of traditional Chinese thought and culture that continue to be expressed today in modern ways.

Inherited and newborn

Culture is a very vague concept with no precise definitions. Different thinkers share different opinions on it. House and Javidan argued that culture contains common motives, values and meanings of remarkable events which come from collective experiences that are transmitted across generations (House and Javidan, 2004). "... the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group or category of people from another proposed Hofstede (Hofstede, 1991). Neuliep indicated what was in my point of view the most reasonable definition, "... an accumulated pattern of attitudes, customs, beliefs and behaviors shared by an identifiable group of people with a common history and verbal and nonverbal symbol systems" (Neuliep, 2015).

What emerges from these definitions is a common point: culture is shared by a group of people. But what else? What are specific characteristics of culture? Further, what exactly is culture?

The most reasonable definition I think is the one given by Neuliep. The reason why I think this definition is the most useful is because the author explains the role of history in defining culture. History is important in defining culture because the particular things that people constantly do is deeply influenced by the common history they share.

For example, during the Chinese New Year, it is part of our culture to go visit our relatives and spend family quality time together. This idea is originated from Confucianism that includes the core thought of “true humaneness” or “humanity” (ren 仁). Since then, thinkers had constantly enriched the meaning and connotation of “humanity” and covered many aspects such as daily life, receiving people and treating things. This 2000-year-old cultural genre has become a major part of Chinese culture. It is also the common history we shared and the verbal and nonverbal symbols we are exposed to that shaped the Chinese nation with a strong emphasis on emotion such as the love for one’s family. This is a very typical example of history playing an important role in culture, especially in Chinese culture.

However, with the rapid development of science and technology, many new cultures is not formed because of the accumulation of history and of the history we share. Are these new cultures excluded? Therefore, the difference in my definition is that culture is accepted by most people at different ages and can be applied in daily life. At the same time, it can quickly spread and to adapt to the changes of the times so as to influence or change people’s lifestyle and attitude.

For example, during the Spring Festival, the elders give red envelopes to the younger generations to express their wishes for the new year. Meanwhile, there are rules and customs for giving and receiving red envelopes. However, with the popularity of mobile payment, people’s consumption mode has changed from cash payment to online payment. In recent years, one can receive red envelopes through an online app known as WeChat has become part of the New Year culture, which is quickly accepted by

people of different ages. It is in line with today's online payment habits and the uncertain amount of money in the process of grabbing a red envelope adds to the fun. It retains the customs of traditional culture but gives new vitality. This new way of receiving red envelopes has transitioned into a traditional part of culture into a more new and innovative part of culture.

In conclusion, from my perspective, culture is the deposit of beliefs, values, behaviors, and meanings shared by a group of people with a common history and collective memory that has the ability to be accepted by people of different ages. Moreover, this new definition of culture should spread quickly and adapt to the changes of the times so that it influences and changes people's lifestyle and attitudes.

Based on this definition of culture, three main aspects will show in *My Country and My People, 2019 edition*: inheritance, embodiment and emergence of new culture. The first aspect is the inheritance of a culture with a long history. That is to say, a culture that still plays an important role today such as pay a New Year call to relatives during the Spring Festival, the influence of Confucian culture on Chinese's people behavior towards others etc. The second aspect is the embodiment of culture in modern life. For example, in ancient times, there were strict rules about wearing jade, some of which had to be bestowed by the emperor, some used to indicate rank and status, some used for decoration and so on. While nowadays, there are no longer so many strict rules about wearing jade, and most people wear it as they like. This reflects the different ways in which culture is expressed in modern life. The third aspect is the rapid emergence and acceptance of a new culture such as receiving red envelope through WeChat.

However, outdated notions of female subordination, family and marriage will not appear in this book because nowadays males and females should play equal roles in a family. This book will not define culture by language. In other words, the use of the same language cannot be one of the elements defining culture. The reason is that if you pick any university in China, even though everyone speaks mandarin, everyone represents a different culture.

In the end, this book is written for anyone who is interested in Chinese culture today, no matter what country you come from and what kind of culture you represent. As long as you want to understand the traditional culture of China, the emerging culture as well as the definition of culture in 2019, this book can give you a new way of thinking about culture.

(946 words)

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