

Viewing the Concept of ‘Harmony without Uniformity’ from the Encounter of Notre-Dame de Paris and the Temple of Heaven — Taking the 2024 China-France Year of Culture and Tourism as an Example

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Abstract: The China-France Year of Cultural and Tourism 2024 serves as a significant bridge for cultural exchange between China and France, marking the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. This paper starts from the concept of “harmony without uniformity” and takes the China-France Year of Cultural and Tourism as the research subject to explore the role of “harmony without uniformity” in cultural exchanges, its specific manifestations in the China-France Year of Cultural and Tourism, and its significance at the level of international relations.

Keywords: harmony without uniformity; China-France Year of Cultural and Tourism 2024; Cultural Diversity

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In the context of globalization, cultural exchanges among countries have become increasingly frequent. China and France, as important representatives of Eastern and Western cultures, possess profound cultural heritage and abundant resources. The China-France Cultural and Tourism Year is a significant initiative in the cultural domain for the two countries, aiming to promote in-depth cultural exchanges through the medium of tourism. In the process of globalization, cultural exchange is not only a vital driving force for economic development but also an essential pathway to enhance mutual understanding among peoples and build a harmonious world. Marx and Engels also discussed cultural dissemination, stating: ‘Whether the productive forces created in a certain region, especially inventions, will be lost in subsequent development depends entirely on the extent of

communication^[1].’ Against this backdrop, the China-France Cultural and Tourism Year, guided by the concept of “harmony without uniformity,” provides new ideas and models for international cultural exchange.

1.2. Literature Review

At present, research on the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism tends to focus on the specific forms of cultural exchange and the development and utilization of tourism resources. Some studies emphasize the role of Sino-French cultural exchange in promoting economic development between the two countries, such as driving related economic activities through the development of the tourism industry. There is also research that pays attention to the mutual influence of Chinese and French cultures during the exchange process and how to enhance national image through cultural exchange. However, there is relatively little research that delves into the impact of the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism on international cultural exchange from the perspective of the concept of “harmony without uniformity.” When analyzing the characteristics and significance of Sino-French cultural exchange, relevant literature often overlooks the unique value of the important concept of “harmony without uniformity” in international cultural exchange.

2. The contribution of “harmony without uniformity” in cultural exchange.

2.1. Promoting harmony in international relations.

Harmony without uniformity” comes from “The Analects of Confucius - Zilu”. It means that a gentleman can maintain a harmonious and friendly relationship with others in interpersonal communication, but he doesn’t have to agree with others on specific issues. At the level of international exchanges, it advocates achieving harmonious coexistence based on respect for the cultural differences of various countries. However, in today’s world, “for a long time, Western countries have adhered to ‘Western centralism’ and ‘Western superiority’ in terms of civilization, and “this hierarchical view of civilization has brought great turmoil and disaster to the world”. In the context of the great changes unseen in a century, the instability and uncertainty of world development have increased unprecedentedly. The regional and international conflicts caused by cultural estrangement, cultural confrontation, and cultural hegemony are gradually uplifting. All countries in the world should “transcend outdated thinking concepts such as cultural conflicts, Cold War mentality, and zero-sum games, and jointly face many existing risks and challenges”. Xi Jinping’s cultural thought adheres to a view of civilization that emphasizes equality, mutual learning, dialogue, and inclusiveness, which embodies the ideological concept of “harmony without uniformity”. It aims to realize the common values of all mankind, implement the Global Civilization Initiative, transcend cultural estrangement through cultural exchanges, transcend cultural conflicts through cultural mutual learning, and transcend cultural superiority through cultural inclusiveness, thereby jointly promoting the progress of human civilization^[2]. In international cultural exchanges, the cultures of different countries collide and understand each other, which helps to establish equal and inclusive international relations. In the cultural exchanges between China and France, by demonstrating the unique charm of their respective cultures, the understanding and trust between the two sides have been enhanced. This is of great significance for building harmonious international relations.

2.2. It is beneficial to protecting cultural diversity.

Cultural diversity is the precious wealth of human society. Every country has its unique culture, and these cultures have formed their own characteristics in the course of historical development. “Harmony without uniformity” emphasizes respecting cultural diversity and encourages countries to maintain the uniqueness of

their own cultures in cultural exchanges. The harmonious coexistence concept of “Appreciating the beauty of one’s own culture and that of others, and achieving common prosperity” and the spirit of the cultural community with a shared future of “Appreciating the beauty of others’ cultures so that all cultures can shine together” have laid a consensual foundation for exchanges, dialogues, mutual learning and development among different civilizations in countries around the world^[2]. The China-France Tourism and Culture Year 2024 has enabled the people of the two countries to understand and respect each other’s cultures better by showing the rich cultural resources of both countries. In the preface to the World Culture Report 1998, Federico Mayor, the former Director-General of UNESCO, said: “A species draws strength from genetic diversity; an ecosystem draws strength from biological diversity; and human communities draw strength from cultural diversity^[3].”

2.3. It has positive significance for “telling China’s stories well and spreading China’s voice effectively”.

In international cultural exchanges, China needs to show its cultural image to the world and spread Chinese culture. “Harmony without uniformity” provides an effective way for China. Through exchanges and interactions with the cultures of other countries, it can display the unique charm of Chinese culture. The China-France Tourism and Culture Year 2024 has offered a platform for China, on which China can tell its own cultural stories and convey Chinese values and cultural concepts. “Chinese culture has accumulated the deepest spiritual pursuits of the Chinese nation, represents the unique spiritual symbol of the Chinese nation, and provides spiritual impetus for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The unique ideas, wisdom, bearing and charm of Chinese culture have added to the confidence and pride deep in the hearts of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation^[4].” While telling China’s stories well, we should also learn from and draw on all the outstanding achievements of human civilizations, adhere to a principle of giving priority to our own while being inclusive. Actively engage with countries around the world, seek wisdom and draw achievements from different civilizations.

3. The specific manifestations of “Harmony without uniformity” in the China-France Tourism and Culture Year 2024

3.1. Harmonious coexistence of China-France culture

During the China-France Tourism and Culture Year 2024, the cultures of the two countries respected and accommodated each other. Firstly, the China-France Tourism and Culture Year opened grandly during the Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival, with Notre-Dame de Paris and the Temple of Heaven being reproduced in the form of ice sculptures. Secondly, in the field of performance, a brand-new Chinese version of the play “Les Misérables”, adapted from the novel of the same name by Victor Hugo, was played by famous Chinese actors. The Ballet of the Opéra National de Bordeaux performed classic ballets such as “La Sylphide” and the third act of “Don Quixote” on Chinese stages. In addition, French cultural elements like wine, perfume, and fashion were integrated with Chinese cultural elements such as traditional festivals, calligraphy, and traditional Chinese medicine in tourism activities. Moreover, in French tourist attractions, tourists could taste traditional Chinese cuisine and enjoy traditional Chinese art performances; in Chinese tourist attractions, French art exhibitions and cultural activities could also be seen. This harmonious coexistence reflects the mutual understanding and respect of the two cultures in exchanges and has laid a foundation for the further exchanges between the two cultures.

3.2. The flourishing of Chinese and French cultures like a hundred flowers in bloom.

During the China-France Tourism and Culture Year 2024, the cultures of both China and France showed their unique charms respectively. Firstly, at the opening ceremony of the China-France Tourism and Culture Year 2024, artists from both countries played excerpts from “Romeo and Juliet” and “Carmen” suites with their own national characteristics, as well as “Flying Apsaras on the Silk Road” and “Jasmine Flower” respectively. Secondly, French cultural arts such as painting, sculpture and music were fully displayed during the French Culture Year, while Chinese cultural arts like Peking Opera, calligraphy and paper-cutting also shone brightly during the Culture Year. In addition, through holding cultural exhibitions, art performances and other activities, people from both countries were able to appreciate the charms of different cultures. Both French ballet and Chinese Peking Opera attracted a large number of audiences during the Culture Year, demonstrating the unique charms of the cultures of both countries. This situation of “a hundred flowers blooming” has promoted the exchanges and development of the cultures of the two countries and enriched the cultural lives of the people of both countries.

3.3. Reviewing Sino-French Relations from the Perspectives of “Harmonious Coexistence and Flourishing Diversity”

China and France have formed a relationship of mutual respect and mutual appreciation in the process of cultural exchanges. From 1963, when then French President Charles de Gaulle authorized then Prime Minister Edgar Faure to come to China with a personal letter from him to discuss issues concerning bilateral relations with Chinese leaders, to 2018 when Emmanuel Macron paid his first visit to China^[5]. Over the past six decades, through thick and thin, this relationship is embodied in the harmonious coexistence and “flourishing diversity” of the cultures of the two countries. Historically, China and France have a long tradition in cultural exchanges. The cultures of the two countries have influenced and learned from each other and have contributed to each other’s cultural development in different periods. In modern society, the exchanges between China and France in the cultural field have become even deeper. Through activities such as the Tourism and Culture Year, the integration and development of the cultures of the two countries have been further promoted. This relationship of harmonious coexistence and “flourishing diversity” has not only promoted the prosperity of the cultures of China and France but also provided a good foundation for the cooperation between the two countries in other fields.

4. The significance at the international level of the China-France Tourism and Culture Year featuring “harmony without uniformity”

4.1. Prevent cultural hegemony

In international cultural exchanges, some countries may attempt to achieve cultural hegemony through cultural export and cultural expansion. Since the 1990s, the Western world has put forward the “Clash of Civilizations” theory. This theory reflects a Western-centered stance, universal values, the mindset of opposing civilizations, as well as the logic of cultural hegemony, and has had a seriously negative impact on the development of human civilizations^[6]. The concept of “harmony without uniformity” emphasizes respecting the differences among the cultures of various countries and opposes cultural hegemony. The China-France Tourism and Culture Year has promoted equal cultural exchanges by showcasing the uniqueness of the cultures of both countries. French cultural arts were displayed during the French Culture Year, and at the same time, Chinese cultural arts were also exhibited during the Culture Year. The two sides

respected and appreciated each other, thus avoiding the emergence of cultural hegemony. This cultural exchange model helps to establish a fair and just international cultural exchange environment and protects the diversity of cultures of all countries.

4.2. It has positive significance for building multilateralism.

Multilateralism stands as a defining and indispensable trend in the evolution of the contemporary international community. In an era characterized by interconnected challenges—from climate change and public health crises to economic instability and security dilemmas—no single nation can unilaterally devise sustainable solutions. Multilateralism, founded on the principles of collective dialogue, institutional cooperation, and shared rules, provides the essential framework for navigating this complex interdependence. It represents a commitment to managing global affairs through inclusive participation and negotiated consensus, thereby fostering stability and predictability in international relations. Within this broad paradigm, cultural diplomacy emerges as a particularly effective and resonant sphere of multilateral engagement. It operates on a foundation of soft power, building bridges of mutual understanding that can pave the way for cooperation in more politically sensitive areas. The China-France Tourism and Culture Year exemplifies this very potential. As a deliberately designed multilateral cultural exchange platform, it extends beyond a simple bilateral event to provide structured opportunities for polyphonic cultural dialogues among various countries. By creating a shared space for artistic, intellectual, and popular cultural interaction, such initiatives translate the abstract principle of multilateralism into tangible, people-centered experiences.

During the process of these cultural exchanges, participant nations can collectively explore critical issues concerning global cultural development through dialogue, cooperation, and joint creation. This collaborative exploration addresses themes such as the preservation of cultural heritage in a digital age, the promotion of cultural diversity against homogenizing forces, and the role of culture in sustainable development. By doing so, countries are effectively practicing a functional form of multilateralism. They are contributing to the improvement of global cultural governance—a sector often overlooked in traditional geopolitics—and helping to safeguard an international order that values pluralism and mutual respect. This practical cooperation carries profound positive significance for the long-term project of building a community with a shared future for mankind, one characterized by the aspirational goals of lasting peace, universal security, common prosperity, openness, inclusiveness, and environmental sustainability. As the theory in a related context, the theoretical and practical exploration of peaceful development concepts provides a relevant framework for understanding such cooperative endeavors, highlighting how shared cultural projects can underpin broader strategic stability^[7].

Furthermore, the operational model of the China-France Tourism and Culture Year illustrates the mechanics of this multilateralism in action. China and France, acting as joint hosts and core facilitators, worked in concert with numerous other countries to stage a diverse array of cultural activities, including film festivals, academic symposiums, art exhibitions, and culinary showcases. This proactive collaboration did more than celebrate two national cultures; it actively created a hub that magnetized and promoted cultural exchanges and cooperation among a wider circle of nations. For instance, a photographic exhibition on biodiversity co-sponsored by French, Chinese, and African institutions, or a joint theatrical production involving artists from across Europe and Asia, would be typical of such initiatives. This multilateral cultural exchange model possesses a multiplier effect. It moves beyond one-off events to establish networks and institutional linkages that persist beyond the official year. Consequently, it significantly contributes to

advancing the overall ecosystem of international cultural relations. By consistently demonstrating that cultural difference is a source of creative collaboration rather than conflict, this model helps to progressively build a more harmonious, empathetic, and inclusively beautiful international cultural environment. This environment, in turn, serves as a vital social and psychological foundation for addressing more contentious political and economic issues on the global stage, proving that multilateralism, starting from culture, offers a viable path toward a more cooperative world order.

5. Conclusion

Guided by the concept of “Harmony without Uniformity”, the China-France Tourism and Culture Year 2024 has played a significant role in promoting international cultural exchanges. By presenting the unique charm of the two countries’ cultures, it has not only revealed the integrated aspect but also enabled us to appreciate the distinctive features of each culture, realizing the harmonious coexistence and “a hundred flowers in bloom” of cultures^[8]. Simultaneously, the China-France Tourism and Culture Year holds positive significance for protecting cultural diversity, preventing cultural hegemony, constructing multilateralism, and building a community with a shared future for mankind. In future international cultural exchanges, we should continue to uphold the concept of “Harmony without Uniformity”, continuously promote the cultural exchanges between China and France, and further boost the exchanges and development of world cultures. We should strive to transcend cultural estrangement through exchanges, replace conflicts with mutual learning, and overcome superiority with inclusiveness, jointly promoting the progress of human civilization. We should establish the harmonious coexistence concept of “Appreciating the Beauty of One’s Own and Others’ Cultures, and Achieving Universal Harmony” and the spirit of the cultural community with a shared future of “Appreciating the Beauty of Others’ Cultures, and All Cultures Shining Together”, laying a consensual foundation for exchanges, dialogues, mutual learning, and development among different civilizations around the world^[9]. Chinese culture has accumulated the deepest spiritual pursuits of the Chinese nation, representing the unique spiritual identity of the Chinese nation and providing spiritual impetus for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The unique ideas, wisdom, grace, and charm of Chinese culture have enhanced the confidence and pride of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation deep within. Therefore, while telling Chinese stories well, we should also learn from and draw on all the outstanding achievements of human civilizations, adhere to a principle of giving priority to our own while being inclusive. Actively engage with countries around the world, seek wisdom and draw nourishment from different civilizations to contribute to the development of world cultures^[10].

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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