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THE ROLE OF HISTORY IN NIGERIAN NATIONALISTS STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE AND THE COMPLEXITY OF THE STRUGGLE

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Abstract: The British colonization of Nigeria necessitated the emergence of a new crop of people known as the “nationalists” on the nation’s political parlance who were targeted to liberate their fatherland from the doldrums of foreign rule that subdued their sovereignties politically, economically, and socially. In this regard, history proved to be pedagogical as it helped the nationalists to accomplish their dream. While it appears that myriads of intellectual works exist on Nigerian nationalism, most, if not all of such works have rather tended to generalise their scope without actually establishing the role of history in the trajectory and as such, the phenomenon beg for more scholarly attention. This paper thematically focuses on the role of history in Nigerian nationalist struggle for independence and the complexity of the struggle. Methodologically, the paper resorted to data provided by secondary sources in the form of textbooks, journals and internet with a discourse style that is quite historical, objective and analytical. Findings indicate that history provided a road map for the nationalists to stage the struggle, revealed to the nationalists how different societies had in the past been successfully liberated by some determined patriots, provided the wherewithal for women nationalists to participate in the struggle, arouse a sense of national consciousness and identity in the Nigerian nationalists, provided historians with the potency to contribute intellectually to the independence of Nigeria, and that it was used to discover the root causes of disunity that bedeviled the country in the struggle. The paper has however unraveled with vigour, that the said struggle was marred with complexity due principally to ethnicism, regionalism, and religion, instituted by the exploitative divide and rule tactic of the colonialists which became endemic scourges that raged the country; thereby creating the embers of disunity and suspicion among the nationalists. This has in turn impacted negatively, on the body polity of Nigeria up to the present postcolonial epoch. It finally notes that albeit this complexity, the nationalists’ eventually bridged theory with reality as independence was actualised, and advocates for more studies to be undertaken in this sphere for a proper appreciation of the inherent potentialities in the discipline especially at the very moment where its survival is seemingly threatened due to extinction.

Keywords: Complexity; History; Independence; Nationalists; Nigeria; Struggle

1 INTRODUCTION

Historically, prior to the British colonization of Nigeria by the late nineteenth to early twentieth century’s, the various ethnic nationalities we know today existed as independent geopolitical enclaves determining the course of their own affairs politically, economically, and socially based on the peculiarities of their environment. Simultaneously, they maintained a considerable degree of social interaction between and among themselves, as was contingent on trade, religion, inter marriages and the like. Crowder as quoted by Mu’azu *Et al* clearly laid emphasis on this point when he wrote:

Within its frontiers were the great Kingdoms of Kanem-Borno, with a known history of more than one thousand years, the Sokoto Caliphate, which for nearly a hundred years before its conquest by the British, ruled most of the Savannah of Northern Nigeria, the Kingdoms of Ife and Benin, whose art has become recognised as amongst the most accomplished in the world, the Yoruba empire of Oyo which had once been the most powerful of the States of the Guinea coast, and the city states of the Niger Delta, the largely politically decentralized Igbo speaking of the South East... and the small tribes of the plateau, some of whom are descendants of the people who created the famous Nok terracotta. [1]

The point must however be stressed that the internal contradictions inherent in the economy of Britain such as the needs for raw materials, new markets, and capital outlets incited by the industrial revolution compelled the British to venture into the drive for colonies that finds answers to the aforesaid problems, and therefore, the Nigerian areas were experimented to be suitable. Thus, by the late 19th to early 20th centuries, the British by means of diplomatic and military maneuvers successfully consolidated their stronghold on the various people thereby changing the geographical and political landscape of the Nigerian areas which had previously existed before the coming of colonialism. The process was formalized in 1914 through the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates under one colonial force the British [1-2].

The above successful attempt by the British colonial state that altered the political structures that had hitherto existed in the Nigerian areas prior to colonialism was to therefore lead to Nigerian nationalism which began right from the years of colonial conquest in the form of resistance by the traditional chiefs and the generality of the people in losing their sovereignty and became much more pronounced in the later years and presumably, after 1914. Ultimately, this nationalism therefore transcends into the emergence of a new crop of people on Nigeria political parlance branded

“nationalists” who were well versed in the historical experience of the past and come to realize that the diverse people within the newly created Nigeria had hitherto existed independently with full legitimate rights and authority in directing the pattern of their affairs and as a consequence, were bent on struggling to achieve the independence of Nigeria with a view to liberating the people from British political subjugation and domination.

Fundamentally, however, plethora's of mechanisms were adopted and of course, played their role by helping the nationalists to achieve their struggle for independence. One of these mechanisms was history. In fact, history proved to be pedagogical in the process as it played decisive role by helping the nationalists to accomplish their dream in many ways that will be x-rayed in the subsequent part of the discourse. Nonetheless, despite the magnificent role played by history in the Nigerian anti-colonial struggle, it has not been accorded its desired credibility by the country including during independence celebration and this has therefore become thought provoking. Hence, the topic of this paper is deliberately chosen to present the role of history in Nigeria nationalist struggle for independence and the complexity of the struggle. The remaining parts of the paper are arranged into sections as follows; conceptual framework, history and Nigerian nationalists struggle for independence, the complexity of the struggle, and then, conclusion,

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 History

Generally, history is conceived to be the study of past events of man in relation to his environment. That notwithstanding, this definition seems to be limited in the scope of understanding as plethora's of realities surrounding history are left untouched and unidentified. As such, the best method that seems to be quite tempting and shall therefore be adopted here is by taking a look at the concept from the intellectual perspective of scholars and historians.

According to Tarnande and pawa, history is the treasure house of knowledge about past events. This definition implies that anything that has to do with the past be it politics, economics, religion, culture, conflict, amongst others is an embodiment of history. History is also defined as “a venerable ramification of Knowledge which generally studies the past activity of man in time perspective. It is an inquiry into the coded event of the past with the view of establishing their meaning and relevance in the present.” [2] This definition raised two major issues that deserve proper attention. Firstly, by emphasizing on the activity of man, it entails that Man occupies a central position in the study of history. Simply put, it is man that creates history. Secondly, history is built on time and historians are always conscious of this principle whenever analyzing the trajectories that relates to human activities be it in the past or present. Malcom as quoted by Habib, defined history as “An aspiration to comprehend the totality of Past human experiences and implicitly to discern in it some messages of present and future utility on the basis of reflecting on the situation.” [3]

From the foregoing definitions, it is acceptable to conceptualize history as the study of human action either from the past, present or future. This suggest that whatever human being does, is doing, or is to do is subject to historical interpretation or historical scrutiny.

2.2 History and Nigerian Nationalist Struggle for Independence

History provided a road map for the nationalists to stage their struggle. This role cannot be detracted from the fact that, the sudden decision of the nationalists to venture into the debilitating but yet inspiring task of fighting for the interest of Nigeria which was purposefully geared towards liberating it from the amnesia of British colonial rule was informed by history. In doing this, the nationalists first, explored historical accounts of the past, orally and documentarily. The stated accounts enabled them to gain explicit understanding as to when, why, and how colonialism was institutionalized by the British around the late 19th to the early 20th centuries thus arriving at the agenda to take the bull by the horn and implicitly champion the struggle for independence. Sufficient to say too, that these accounts constituted the precursor for which the likes of Herbert Macaulay, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr.Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Anthony Enahoro, Solanke Ladipo, Oluwofumilayo Ransome Kuti, and Joseph S. Tarkaa (whom represents an inexhaustible list of the concerned nationalists) systematically acquainted themselves with the knowledge of what actually transpired in the pre-colonial epoch as regards the form of governance that was dictated by the Nigerians, in juxtaposition to what obtained in the colonial epoch under which the British imperialists by means of skillful political, military, economic, diplomatic and deceitful tactics successfully altered Nigerians system of governance that became exploitatively, ruthlessly and brutally tainted. Put another way, by exhuming the Nigerian tale in the annals of pre-colonial and colonial historiography, the nationalists came to locate the bedrock of their exploitation and subjugation. This scenario in the right conception of the nationalists underscored the imperative need for an abrupt end to the colonial system. After all, a short yet cogent aphorism goes in this way “identifying a problem by probing into its genesis constitutes a pre-requisite in solving the problem.

While the biography of the aforementioned nationalists is beyond the scope of this work, but which would nevertheless clarify the matter, a perusal of available documentary evidence on their lifestyles do indicates that with the exception of Herbert Macaulay, who was born since 1864, hardly was any of them so matured enough at the time of the British conquest of their respective areas as to know vividly the tracks of events that unfounded pertaining to colonialism. To avoid doubt, Ransome-Kuti according to records was born in 1900, Zikiwe in 1904, Awolowo in 1909, Bello in 1910, and Tarkaa in 1932. In this token, one is doubtful how they came about this in-depth knowledge of the Nigerian past if not from history. Not only were there concisely informed by historical antecedents, but the acquisition of this knowledge can be considerably adjudged to have marked the beginning of the desire which was subsequently backed by

actions to liberate the Nigerian people from the forces of foreign domination in what eventually gained prominence as “struggle for independence.” It was in appreciation of this logic of history that Awolowo, one of the leading nationalists whose penchant and resilience for Nigerian freedom was glaringly expressed, foresightedly stated pertaining to the Nigerian independence the following “we must study our past to understand our present and shape our future” and that “Nigerian nationalism is not a sudden growth, but a product of historical forces.”[4] Judging from the analytical framework drawn so far, one is not left in doubt that history provided a road map for the Nigerian nationalists in their liberation struggle for the country’s independence.

A more scientific spectacle of the role of history in the nationalist struggle for the independence of Nigeria could be located under the pretext that nationalists through historical revelation learn how different societies or individuals had in the past been successfully liberated by some determined patriots from the backwoods of either bad leadership or threat by foreign aggressors or both. A plethora of evidences that palpably point to this scenario abound. Shehu Usman Danfodiyo, Abdullahi Fodiyo and Muhammadu Bello, the great Jihadist leaders were able to strategically and meaningfully manipulate Islamic religion as a portent gimmick to bring out the Hausa people in the early 19th century, from the onus of maladministration perpetrated by the Habe rulers who developed very high corrupt, despotic, exploitative, and arbitrary tendencies in the discharge of their government responsibilities. It is therefore not surprising that Sir Ahmadu Bello (The Sarkin Sokoto and Premier of Northern region), who spearheaded the independence struggle from the Northern region was a descendant of the Jihadists and to be exact, Usman Dan Fodiyo. The significance of this evidence to contemporary historians represents a call on the Sarkin Sokoto to tap from the past example of his charismatic ancestors (Jihadists), by fully partaking in the movement to emancipate the Northern people, and Nigerians at large, from alien rule. A rational observer of the entire historical process may be tempted to raise a question as to why there existed a host of people with rational abilities from the North during the period under discussion, but the man to be bestowed with this mantle of leadership happened to emerge from the family of the eminent Sheikhs. The political wisdom and philosophy of Abrahams Alegh as cited by Tim can at best be brought to sharp consideration as an answer to the foregoing question. It reads:

The rise of any politician in Africa starts with the blessing of his immediate community. By this, we mean that, no matter one’s fame internationally or nationally, if one does not have the home support, one’s fall in politics is inevitable.[5]

Understandably, by and large, the Sarkin Sokoto was chosen by nature and among his kith and kin, as the best man to carry out the aforesaid mandate given his wealth of historical experience that arose directly from emulation of the good legacies left behind by his ancestors (The three Sheikhs). It is also logical to reason that the nationalists been well equipped in the past experience of patriots like Olaudah Equiano of the Igbo, Attahiru II of the moribund Sokoto Caliphate, King Jaja of Opobo, and Nana of Itsekiri among others felt entitled to use this experience in dealing with their British colonial overlords. One way they optimistically succumbed to and typified this experience was by opposing any aspect of the colonial policies with a view to compelling the colonialists to relinquish power to the sons and daughters of the soil. As Ransome-Kuti intelligibly sum it up “the history of our people is a story of resistance and resilience.”

The notion in question can also be adjudged from the angle of women nationalists. This is precisely done to resist the nagging temptation to evoke gender prejudice or stereotype into the discourse as recent scholars with keen interest in this area (gender studies) has cynically observed hence “women in Nigeria have been marginalized in the historical record, despite their many contributions.” [6] Interestingly, history provided the wherewithal, and as well endowed the women nationalists with the directed optimism to participate in Nigerian nationalism. The women nationalists did this by visiting the past which informed them that women were since time immemorial, recognised in the Nigerian society for navigating through the odds and challenges that encumbered them by undertaking their roles to an appreciable extent, in different spheres of societal life and development with politics inclusive. These roles qualify such women to be accorded special positions of recognition in the tapestry of history. Popularising this point, Adesina had this to say:

...In the annals of Africa’s most populous and dynamic country, the knowledge about women boasts a rich history of influential women who have shaped the political, social, economic, and cultural landscapes. Narratives of these powerful women are quite popular and have spread across generations. Prominent among these women are Queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Idia of Benin, Emotan of Benin, Nana Asmau...[7]

It is considered akin to the prevailing thought that when the women nationalists went down the memory lane into history, they remembered how the above named women figures and many more were harbingers of development in their respective societies, and could not help imagining why their (women nationalists) case should be different. This pertinently underlay the secret behind the pro-activism demonstrated by a good number of women in order to mitigate Nigeria from British colonial tutelage. As such, available records are replete with the evidences of brave women across the nooks and crannies of Nigeria who magnanimously conquered cultural and socio-religious impediments to render their quota in the struggle for independence. This was true of the western region that witnessed the emergence of women nationalists like Chief Mrs Fumilayo Ransome Kuti, Margaret Ekpo; Hajjiyya Gambo Sawaba from the Northern region; so did the determined women in Eastern region adopted a radically revolutionary posture against colonialism and more precisely, using the Aba Women Riot of 1929-1930. To this extent, the kind of nationalism undertaken by those concerned women should be aptly contextualised within the purview of these historical trajectories. It is also rational to posit that history arouse a sense of national identity and consciousness in the Nigerian nationalists during the independence struggle. This national identity initially operated at the cultural level, before it was subsequently demonstrated at a fully fledged political level and of course, mechanism that was formidably used to

tackle colonialism. This fact appears to be convincing when it is noted that culture and history are dialectically interconnected and interrelated. In short, culture is a child of history as it is from the latter that the former is preserved and transmitted from one generation to another. The major political parties that masterminded the Nigerian nationalism during the historical epoch under study are pointers that succinctly lend credence to this idea. A cursory look at the nature of these political parties shows that they (political parties) most often than not, began as cultural associations before transcending into political parties. To be specific, from the North, the *Jamiyya Mutaneh Arewa* cultural group of the Hausa/Fulani transformed into the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) in 1951, whereas in the West, the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, a Yoruba socio-cultural group formed in 1949 midwived the Action Group (AG) which officially came into force in 1951. This assertion became more realistically affirmed in the words of Yusuf and Zakaririya as they averred: *"Therefore history helps us to understand the origin of our existence. It helps us understand and answer such questions as who are we? Where did our ancestors come from? What was the society and culture like during their time? What did we inherit from them? What is it that we have to do to be like them? Thus, history helps us understand everything about our past so that we can build on it."*[8]

It was after a rigorous acquaintance into the preceding antics of the Nigerian historical past that the formation of the above named cultural associations which unabashedly transitioned into political parties became inevitable. In effect, these political parties were undoubtedly, staggering instruments that predetermined and galvanised the nationalists' heated struggle for independence. To strengthen this point, it was under the aegis of these political parties that Nigerians notably the nationalists were elected into legislative houses, ventilated their feelings towards colonial rule and conscientised the Nigerian people on the pressing issues of the day as regards colonialism. Most fundamentally, the nationalists who represented Nigeria in the various constitutional conferences and debates such as those converged in Ibadan, Lagos and London in 1951, 1953 and 1957/58 respectively were drawn from the various political parties. To this end, if it is agreed that these political parties were inherently characterised by historical undertones, there can be no disputing the fact that they represented the role of history in the nationalist liberation struggle. As pungently adumbrated thus:

It can hardly be disputed that everything about the emergence of the world is history. What is being said here by extension is that the world itself is a product of history. It can therefore be said that history is the source of all that has come to be.[9]

The role of history in the subject matter under concern can also be deduced within the prism of concerted efforts made by historians. As the interpreters of historical processes, historians contributed intellectually to the attainment of Nigerian independence. Among these historians, the personality of Professor K.O. Dike can be figure out to substantiate this point. The appearance on the scenery around the 1950s, of a highly visionary historian like Professor K.O. Dike, who was endowed with the wisdom of sound judgments, was consequential. In that, Dike was not just conceived by his contemporaries from the academia and elsewhere, as a person who had the "messianic" and promising role to play in the struggle, but was also predicated unmistakably, on the tireless quest to salvage his fellow Nigerians from the dreaded ravages of colonialism. In a bid to pursue what can rightly be considered as the "Nigerian cause", the first thing that attracted the attention of the historian for solution was how to reconstruct the Western (European) misinterpretation of African's historical past in general and Nigeria in particular. At the heart of this misinterpretation was the theoretical premise that, "Africa has no history prior to European adventurism on the continent." It (the misinterpretation) was inadvertently, a by-product of the Hamitic hypothesis which holds that the entire race in Africa are devoid of any useful initiative capable of bringing development. That even the few of such developments eminent in the continent must be externally inclined from Europe or Asia. The foregoing point was evidenced in the words of notable Euro Centric scholars like professors Perham and Hugh. For the avoidance of doubt, Perham as cited in Apollos work, once stated that "Until the very recent penetration by Europe the greater part of the continent (Africa) was... without writing and so without history." Hugh (1965:9), re-popularised this ideology. He put it this way:

Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none; there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness and darkness is not the subject of history.[10]

But one rational observation to be made from the above divergent however, seemingly interconnected assertions as they relates to the phenomenon under investigation is that, they tends to serve a dual purpose in the historical arena. They (the two assertions) were not only convincing to the historians that such a characterisation of the African continent including Nigeria by the inordinate ambitious imperialist scholars of the era was capable of denigrating the potency of the people in governing themselves, but also lured the entire globe to confide in the inferiority complex held by the British towards Nigerians. It was indeed, this scenario that prompted Dike to illuminate the minds of these Europeans scholars and their cohorts whom though, recalcitrant in changing their viewpoint, were eventually compelled by the highly explanatory and analytical logic of the African and of course, Nigerian historians to dispel it. Equally, Dike and his historical stalwarts beamed their spot light on the faces of Nigerians' to realize that the Europeans has no justifiable right whatsoever in the aforesaid claim. It follows therefore, that while the nationalists were clamoring on the need for the independence of Nigeria from the political fora, Dike and his compatriots on the other hand, were busy waging an intellectual revolutionary war against colonialism from the academic fora through their credible writings and works. As a British writer coherently postulate "the pen is mightier than the sword." For the avoidance of doubt, Dike's efforts was exemplified by his publication of *African History and Self-Government* in 1953 where he revealed that the future of Nigeria depends on the ability to manage their own affairs, *Trade and politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* published in 1956 where he acclaimed that Nigerians

must be the architects of their own destiny, and founding of the *Ibadan School of History* which has been practically observed by Afigbo that this school:

Came into being at a time when the foremost pre-occupations of Nigeria were the winning of political independence from Britain and the construction of a Nigerian nationality out of the ramshackle colonial state created by Britain. At that time, hardly did anyone raise the issue of the character or quality of that nationality.[11]

Instructively, not quite long the historians joined the nationalists in this race (the 1950s), that the British colonialists quickly handed over the baton of governance to Nigerians, so as to enable the latter to determine the course of their political affairs, notwithstanding the emergence of neo-colonialism. Had these patriotic historians' of the Dike type decided to shy away from the responsibility bequeathed on them by virtue of their wisdom of value based judgments deeply mired in history as earlier stated, and maintained a lukewarm attitude of "sit and look" as was, and still remains the attitude of many Nigerians, one could have perhaps, argue that despite the doggedness displayed by the nationalists, the eventual achievement of Nigerian independence on 1st October, 1960, would have been extended to a much later date. On the strength of these considerations, it becomes quite clear that, the historians contributed inexorably to the Nigerian nationalist struggle for independence. This scenario constitutes the etymological background to the prestigious title of "nationalist historians" conferred on the historians thereby signifying the role of history in the episode.

History was also used as an enviable tool to unearth the causes of disunity in Nigeria by the nationalists during the struggle for the country's independence. Put it more elaborately, when Nigeria was plunged into a state of disunity as a result of frictions that arouse among the nationalists of the three regions; North, West, and East in the course of the independence struggle, they (nationalist) could not but utilized history to discover the focal rationale behind the frictions that scandalised them and the country at large. It can be said pungently that at this juncture, the nationalists could not but yielded to the temptation of their high provocative tempo to condemn out rightly, the arrangement that brought the diverse ethnic cleavages into a single geopolitical entity called Nigeria. It could be recalled also that the creation of Nigeria in 1914 by the British was followed forthwith the emergence of three major calamities; ethnicism, regionalism, and religion that tended to negativities and direct the pattern of politics in Nigeria from the colonial era till date. A case in point was the argument made by Chief Obafemi Awolowo refuting the description of Nigeria as a "nation which has appeared variously in the recently written works of scholars with keen interest on Nigerian nationalism particularly Ajor and others. Awolowo opined:

Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there 'English', 'Welsh', or 'French'. The 'word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not[12]

Whatever may be the accuracy behind this opinion, the point that readers should drive home by the above publication is that, Awolowo was simply historicising on how the diverse ethnic groups existed independently, though inter-relatedly, with each tribal grouping having due regard for the other before they were coercively integrated into one geopolitical entity (Nigeria), arising from the artificial boundaries created by colonialism. Without being in concord with Awolowo's opinion, the artificial boundaries must be underscored as a ploy that was deliberately orchestrated by the British to drive home their motive of economic exploitation however, in disguise of political subordination. If this is what Awolowo portrayed by the above assertion, then, it is tantamount to accepting also the view that the intricacies of history were at work in properly informing the nationalists that had the British incorporation of the diverse ethnic nationalities into one polity was effected by taking into cognisance their (ethnic groups) peculiarities, perhaps, the primordial sentiments that sowed the seed of discord and disunity among the various people with the nationalists inclusive would have been minimised, if not completely averted. As a corollary, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (in Coleman, 1958:320), also delved into the history of Nigeria to lament bitterly yet realistically, the new geopolitical order inaugurated by the colonialists under the auspices of amalgamation, as the major cause of difficulties in the struggle for independence. The lamentation read in part:

*Since 1914, the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are **historically** different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs, and customs and do not show themselves any sign of willingness to unite. Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country.*[13]

As if that was all, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto also hold his historical acumen as a weapon to challenge the British agenda that incorporated the various ethnic groups into one country, Nigeria. This was particularly when the tribal and regional animosities reverberated on the country's political arena in the Kano riot of 1953. Expressing his deep heartfelt bitterness on the riot in a historical context, therefore, Sardauna was quoted to have said "The mistake of 1914 has come to light." [14] One important lesson that can be discerned from the above divergent but seemingly collaborative thoughts of the Awolowo, Balewa, and Bello is that the crisis in question and other issues associated with their grievances occurred long after the amalgamation, but all of them had to quickly go back to the past and specifically, 1914. This was for them to primarily understand the complicated nature and character of the crisis situation. It became crystal clear that, history was pivotal in dictating to the prudent nationalists on the need to probe into the genesis of the crisis for the purpose of equally deciding on how to handle it in order to achieve independence. Whether those nationalists were able to judiciously apply this knowledge of history they had gained and resolved their controversy or not will be made known subsequently, in the flow of historical analysis.

3 THE COMPLEXITY OF THE STRUGGLE

It must be emphatically stressed at this juncture that, despite the applicability of history in the struggle as presented in the preceding section, the struggle was complex in nature due largely to centrifugal forces like ethnicism, regionalism and religion which as already espoused, created disunity and by implication, conflict among the nationalists. Some scholars has therefore capitalised on the stated forces to apportion much blame on the nationalists as part of the *raison d'être* behind the complexity of the situation. This scenario is what tempted Olusegun(2014) to brand those patriots as “so-called Nigerian nationalists.” The scholar further maintained that:

Instead of exploring ways of reconciling the apparently irreconcilable forces for a united and focused nation, the Nigerian political elites emphasized them to the point of dismemberment for selfish reasons. The elites failed to encourage the need to harness extant elements of unity and co-existence instead they reinforced micro-patriotism with religion and tribe as instruments of nurture.[15]

While the above underpinning is to a large extent, correct in view of the circumstances that culminated into the independence of Nigeria, that unpalatable nomenclature of “so-called nationalists” coined by the above named scholar needs to be carefully and sincerely examined by purging out some subterranean facts. One thing that is beyond doubt is the fact that in dealing with the issue of conflict be it physically or psychologically, it must be borne in mind that, this was not a peculiar phenomenon to the nationalists. Indeed, conflict is a concept that dates back to the history of human relations itself. This explains why one is optimistic with Karl Marx in his theory of historical determinism that, “the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle.” When a survey of the capitalist situation in Europe in the era of industrialization is conducted, it becomes much more conspicuous to appreciate this fact. It was the internal contradictions such as the desires for raw materials, new markets, and capital investment that transcended into “conflict of interest” among the major contending European capitalist nations of Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Italy and Spain. These needs went along way in precipitating them (powers) to as a matter of necessity, arrived at a unanimous agreement to colonise the vast continent of Africa and in particular, Nigeria. To have therefore branded the nationalists as “so-called Nigerian nationalists” because of the regional and ethnic conflicts that beclouded Nigeria during the struggle for independence, and which has continue unabated till date is rather a product of faulty reasoning borne out of misdirected optimism. As already established, even the colonial masters themselves were first plunged into conflict and there is a logical connection that the said conflict was arguably, bound to mammothly affect the nationalists in their struggle for Nigeria's self rule. The issue of misunderstanding that ensued among the nationalists should therefore be viewed as a normal phenomenon which any one could have done; and not the description of been “so-called” as the learned scholar may like us to believe.

The principle of objectivity must however, be allocated its rightful place in the historical analysis of political and social phenomenon so as not to be entangled in the gamut of sentimentality. In this vain, the inability of the Nigerian nationalists to resolve their skirmishes that were deeply rooted in the politics of ethnicism and regionalism introduced by the colonialists as earlier stated, can be counted as the area where they did not help matters. This point can best be understood by way of comparison. Going back to the issues that hamstringing the European powers on the eve of colonialism, historical evidence has revealed that despite their conflicts, an amicable settlement was successfully reached by the competing nations (Europeans), before the dream for the acquisition of Nigeria and other African enclaves materialised. This fact becomes veracious when the Berlin conference of 1884/1885 convened under the stewardships of Otto Von Bismark, and Jules Ferry, Chancellor of Germany and Prime Minister of France respectively is recalled. It was this historic conference that settled the ‘conflict of interest’ among the major European powers by addressing the lingering issues involved in the conflict, and as a consequence, acted as a milestone in determining the conditions under which the territories like Nigeria were acquired. It can be posited here and correctly too, that, the inability of the nationalists from the three regions to come together on a round table having known the major issues that accounted for their conflict by digging into reliable historical paraphernalia's as presented above, was rather unfortunate. As Carr avers, history “consist essentially in seeing the past through the eyes of the present and in the light of its problems” so also Wright noted that “the study of our period must be a comparative examination of these worlds and their interactions.” Suffice to say that had the nationalists come to grasp these two rational lessons of history to settle their misunderstanding in the years of the struggle before independence was eventually granted to Nigeria in 1960, most, if not all, the myriads of challenges that inhibits the country under the postcolonial dispensation but are ingrained in the colonial past would have been improbable, if not almost impossible.

There are however, basic facts that must be made clear about the inability of the nationalists to unsuccessfully hearken to the aforethought historical lessons of Carr and Wright, in settling their misunderstanding as noted from the preceding paragraph. The exploitative character of the British colonialists that finds expression in “divide and rule” was what dragged the nationalists to be pitted at loggerheads against each other in their independence struggle. This implies that the crafty colonialist finds in divide and rule as a tactic that has a promising impact to accomplish, and hence, playing one region against another. But how did the British demonstratedly manipulated the divide and rule tactic to factionalise the nationalists and Nigerians as a whole?

Numerous evidences could be drawn from the various policies of the Governors of colonial Nigeria under the auspices of constitutions to arrive at a coherent answer. Beginning with the first Governor of Colonial Nigeria, Lord Lugard, when the Nigerian Council of 1914 was set up, 2 out of the 6 unofficial Nigerians in the council were drawn from the North, whereas the West and East had one each. Similarly, Clifford and Richard in their constitutions of 1922 and 1946 respectively limited voting rights to Lagos (3) and Calabar (1), thus disenfranchising many Nigerians. The legislative council created by Clifford was limited to the Southern province but did not include representatives from the North, as the Governor reserved the prerogative to make laws for the latter by proclamation. In addition, while the Northern

region was given a bicameral legislature (Houses of Assembly and Chiefs) under the Richard constitution, the West and East on the other hand, had only a unicameral legislature thereby creating an imbalance in the political pyramid of power. Then, came Macpherson with his constitution of 1951 that added salt to injury by allowing the North and West to operate with a bicameral legislature, howbeit, the East still remained under its unicameral legislature. The most pathetic of all, was the division of Nigeria into 3 unequal regions with the North occupying the largest Size as compared to the West and East. Consequent upon that, Nigeria envisaged, though regrettably, the emergence of three major ethnic groups; Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba from the North, West and East respectively that over populate and marginalise the less populated ethnic groups. This is the genesis of majority-majority question in the body polity of Nigeria that hydra-headedly affect the desire for cooperate existence up till today.

To continue probing into the complexity of the struggle in question that was concomitantly influenced by the misunderstanding that arouse among the nationalists, that defies their efforts for resolution would rather rejuvenate the already provoking sentiments. But it is evidently clear that the “divide and rule” became the sharpened edges of the colonial knife in exploiting the people and creating the impulses that thwarted all efforts intensified by the nationalists to resolve their collisions, and broker peaceful coexistence for national unity, social cohesion, and harmony in the struggle for independence. In any case, posterity reserves the prerogative to perfect judgement.

4 CONCLUSION

This paper was grounded on the presupposition that history played a decisive role in the nationalist struggle for and actualisation of the independence of Nigeria. The decision to base the discourse on this topic was informed by the fact that despite being a force that paradigmatically assisted the nationalists in this regard, scholars has hardly, if not totally, hesitated in devoting their significant attention to bringing out expediently, these role. To say that the modicum of issues extensively brought to limelight were in the main, directed to achieve this idea is only a recapitulation of what has been accomplished by the paper. It also did not foreclose the reality that certain forces such as ethnicism, regionalism and religion accounted for the complexity of the struggle. In an aura quite welcoming, the nationalists were able to manage these grudges and reach the destination point which as affirmed, was nothing more or less than independence. And as a philosopher once noted “The greatest emotional need of an individual is to feel appreciated.” That is what the leaders, contemporary historians, political analysts, and the entirety of Nigerians owes the nationalists in their enviable role of setting Nigeria and its good people free from the backwoods of British colonial control.

The paper at this juncture drags the argument to a logical conclusion; and this seems to be that history was fundamentally used as a weapon in dictating and shaping the trajectories that transcended into the nationalist struggle for independence of Nigeria; and this, it must be stated in crystal clear terms, underpins its (history) role in the struggle. There is thus the need for more studies to be undertaken in this sphere for a proper appreciation of the inherent potentialities of history especially at the very moment where its survival is seemingly threatened due to extinction by the Nigerian government and the citizenry.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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THE PATH OF INNOVATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF LI BING CULTURE

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Abstract: As an important part of Chinese excellent traditional culture, Li Bing culture carries profound historical background and rich spiritual connotation. In the context of the new era, how to realize the innovative development of Li Bing's culture and make it glow with new vitality in contemporary society is an important issue worthy of in-depth discussion. This study first summarizes the core connotation of Li Bing's culture, including “governing water and rejuvenating the country, learning from nature, seeking truth and innovation, and harmony between man and water”. Then, it analyzes the necessity of the innovative development of Li Bing culture, and points out the needs of the development of the times, cultural inheritance and social development. This study proposes a specific path for the innovative development of Li Bing's culture, including in-depth exploration of the spiritual connotation of Li Bing's culture ; promote the creative transformation of Li Bing culture ; strengthen the international exchange and cooperation of Li Bing culture; promote the inheritance and development of Li Bing culture; to promote the deep integration of Li Bing culture and ecological civilization construction. Through these paths, we can effectively promote the inheritance and promotion of Li Bing's culture, make it play a greater role in contemporary society, and contribute more to the creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese excellent traditional culture.

Keywords: Li Bing culture; Innovation; Cultural heritage; Path

1 INTRODUCTION

As the soul and spiritual banner of the nation, culture carries historical memory, lifestyle and values. With the surging tide of globalization and the rapid development of science and technology, the status of culture in the competition of comprehensive national strength has become increasingly prominent, and cultural self-confidence has become the key support for national development. Li Bing culture, as an important part of Chinese excellent traditional culture, has experienced thousands of years of precipitation, containing rich spiritual connotation and profound historical heritage. It not only witnessed the wisdom and courage of the ancient working people, but also showed its unique charm and vitality in contemporary society.

Li Bing, the great creator of Dujiangyan water conservancy project, his water control concept and practice have made the Chengdu Plain rich and prosperous. His concept of “governing water and rejuvenating the country, learning from nature, seeking truth and innovation, and harmony between people and water” is not only a treasure of ancient water conservancy projects, but also provides valuable enlightenment for the development of modern society. The success of the Dujiangyan water conservancy project has made the Chengdu Plain get rid of the trouble of floods and become a “land of abundance” with abundant products, laying a solid foundation for the economic prosperity and social stability of the past dynasties. The wisdom of respecting nature and conforming to nature contained in Li Bing's culture, as well as the spiritual connotation of brave exploration and bold innovation in practice, is of great significance to our study and life. It teaches us to revere nature and live in harmony with nature; encourage us to innovate in the face of difficulties and continue to pursue progress.

In the context of the new era, how to crack the password of the innovative development of Li Bing's culture and make it glow with new vitality in contemporary society has become an important issue that needs to be further studied. This study will explore the effective way of Li Bing's cultural innovation development through the in-depth analysis of Li Bing's cultural connotation and the guidance of cultural thought. Cultural thought emphasizes the importance of cultural self-confidence and points out that culture is the soul of a country and a nation. It provides a solid theoretical basis and practical guidance for the inheritance and development of Li Bing's culture, encourages us to dig deeper into the contemporary value of Li Bing's culture, and promotes its creative transformation and innovative development in modern society.

Studying the innovative development path of Li Bing's culture not only helps to inherit and carry forward this precious cultural heritage, but also plays an active role in the construction of a cultural power and contributes unique cultural strength to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Through in-depth research, we hope to provide useful reference and reference for the inheritance and development of Li Bing's culture, so that this ancient and brilliant culture will shine more brightly in the new era.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

With 5W communication theory as the guiding framework, Pu explores the external communication strategy of Li Bing culture, discusses the definition of celebrity culture, comes up with the definition of Li Bing culture, points out its

historical significance and contemporary value, collects and organizes relevant materials, analyzes the current situation and problems of communication, and proposes the response strategy from the five dimensions of communication main body, content, channel, object, and effect, with a view to bring inspiration to the practice of the external communication of Li Bing culture and the culture of famous people of Bashu [1]. Wang et al. showed that Li Bing culture is a part of the excellent traditional Chinese culture, and its spiritual connotation is specifically expressed as “water governance, mastery of nature, truthfulness and innovation, and harmony between people and water”, and combined with the national policy as well as the needs of economic and cultural development in the new era, it puts forward the suggestions for the inheritance and development of Li Bing culture [2]. Yang and Zhao pointed out that Li Bing's water control has made Sichuan a land of heaven with thousands of miles of fertile land. His water control contains the scientific nature of nature, the unity of heaven and man, the people's nature of reverence for life, benevolence and love for things, and the practicality of making the best use of the situation and adapting to the times. It is a concrete manifestation of the connection between the history and reality of traditional culture, which is highly consistent with the concept of the new era. Inheriting the Chinese context, we should promote the popularization and modernization of Chinese excellent traditional culture represented by Li Bing's water control culture [3]. Li et al. pointed out that the Dujiangyan water conservancy project still plays a highly efficient function even though it has lasted for more than 2,000 years, and the article synthesized the documentary records, archaeological discoveries and folk legends to try to conduct a systematic examination of the life and place of origin of Li Bing, the guardian of Shu of Qin, and his water-control history in Shu, and to explore the connotation of the cultural value of the historical celebrities and their contemporary conversion strategies [4]. These researches have deeply explored the historical value, spiritual connotation, contemporary significance and inheritance development strategy of Li Bing culture from different perspectives, providing a rich theoretical basis and reference for further research and practice of Li Bing culture.

At the level of value enhancement and style construction, Zhao's study points out that the value growth of Li Bing culture IP plays a key role in enhancing cultural influence, promoting cultural development and inheritance as well as strengthening local culture and city ranking. In the era of new media, the creation of IP value is closely connected with youth subculture, and the subculture of youth groups, as the main consumers of the Internet, has an important influence on the style construction of Li Bing's cultural IP [5]. According to Herbertig's classic theory, from the perspective of collage, isomorphism and ideological practice, through the appropriation of network elements, reconstruction of meaning, organic combination of traditional culture and subculture symbols resonance, and expanding the channels of audience perception and participation, and providing space for expression of meaning, it can realize the stylistic adaption of Li Bing's cultural IP to the Internet ecosystem, enhance its recognition and ecological integration, and achieve the upgrading of the IP value. In terms of contemporary value and transformation and development, Ling's research found that the contemporary value of Li Bing culture, as a part of the excellent traditional Chinese culture, is mainly embodied in three aspects: firstly, the concept of being an official, which is “to serve an official for the benefit of one party”; secondly, the spirit of great national craftsmanship; and thirdly, the application of ancient Chinese philosophical thinking in engineering technology [6]. In-depth exploration of the contemporary value of Li Bing culture aims to realize its creative transformation and innovative development, in order to help contemporary China's economic and cultural construction [7]. In the dimension of historical achievements and spiritual inheritance, Pan's research emphasizes that Li Bing built Dujiangyan and irrigation canal projects, which played the functions of irrigation, transportation, flood control, etc., and laid the foundation of ecology, industry, and shipping in the Land of Heaven, and that his achievements, stories, and spiritual resonance integrated into the hearts of the people in Shu, made Li Bing the founder and guardian of the Land of Heaven and was admired by the whole world [8]. These studies point out the direction for the subsequent research on Li Bing's cultural communication.

3 NECESSITY OF THE RESEARCH

Li Bing culture, as an important part of the excellent traditional Chinese culture, has been precipitated for thousands of years and contains rich spiritual connotation and deep historical background. It not only witnesses the wisdom and courage of the ancient working people, but also shows its unique charm and vigorous vitality in contemporary society. It is necessary to study the path of creative development of Li Bing culture in many aspects.

First of all, it is the requirement of the times to promote the creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese excellent traditional culture. As an important part of Chinese excellent traditional culture, Li Bing culture, with its profound historical heritage and humanistic value, provides rich materials for the cultural construction in the new era. Through innovative development of Li Bing culture, we can stimulate the vitality of traditional culture, make it compatible with modern society, and inject new impetus into the cultural construction of the new era. This not only helps to pass on and carry forward the excellent traditional Chinese culture, but also strengthens the national cultural soft power and enhances international influence.

Secondly, the wisdom and methods shown by Li Bing in the process of water management are important inspiration and reference for the development of modern water conservancy. The scientific concepts and practical experience contained in Li Bing's culture can provide useful references for the planning, design, construction and management of modern water conservancy projects. Through the innovative development of Li Bing culture, it can promote the sustainable development of water conservancy, improve the efficiency of water resources utilization, and solve the many challenges faced by contemporary water conservancy.

In addition, Li Bing culture, as a spiritual wealth of the Chinese nation, has a strong cohesive and inspirational force. In the journey of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, cultural self-confidence and national cohesion are indispensable spiritual power. Through the innovative development of Li Bing culture, it can enhance people's sense of identity and pride in the excellent traditional Chinese culture, stimulate the patriotic fervor and national pride of all Chinese children, and provide solid spiritual support for the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

At the same time, with the growth of population and economic development, the shortage of water resources and water ecological deterioration is becoming more and more prominent, and has become a bottleneck restricting the sustainable development of economy and society. The concept of "learning from nature and harmonizing water with human beings" in Li Bing culture provides valuable ideas for solving this problem. Through the innovative development of Li Bing culture, we can promote the construction of a water-saving society and ecological civilization, promote the rational use of water resources and the protection of water ecology, and effectively respond to the challenges of water resource shortage and water ecological deterioration.

Finally, the innovative spirit and practical ability shown by Li Bing in the process of water management is an important revelation for modern scientific and technological innovation and industrial upgrading. The innovative thinking and scientific methods contained in Li Bing's culture can provide inspiration and reference for modern scientific and technological research and industrial innovation. Through the innovative development of Li Bing culture, it can stimulate the innovation vitality of the whole society, promote scientific and technological innovation and industrial upgrading, and provide a new source of power for economic and social development.

4 SPECIFIC PATHS AND MEASURES FOR THE INNOVATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF LI BING CULTURE

4.1 In-Depth Excavation of the Spiritual Connotation of Li Bing Culture

Strengthen academic research, organize experts and scholars to carry out in-depth research and excavation of Li Bing culture, and sort out its historical lineage and spiritual connotation. Promote the academic research and dissemination of Li Bing culture by organizing academic conferences and publishing academic works. Academic research can not only reveal the deep value of Li Bing culture, but also provide solid theoretical support for subsequent cultural inheritance and innovation.

Carry out publicity and education to popularize the historical background and spiritual connotation of Li Bing culture to the public by organizing exhibitions, lectures, performances and other forms of activities. At the same time, new media platforms are utilized to strengthen publicity and promotion and increase the visibility and influence of Li Bing culture. The interactivity and extensiveness of the new media platform can attract the attention of the younger generation and revitalize Li Bing culture in modern society.

In the process of strengthening academic research and publicity and education, we should not only focus on the depth and breadth of content, but also on the innovation and diversification of forms. For example, in academic research, interdisciplinary cooperation, combined with history, culture, water conservancy engineering and other fields of knowledge, comprehensive and in-depth excavation of the spiritual connotation of Li Bing culture. In publicity and education, it can be combined with modern technological means, such as virtual reality, augmented reality, etc., so that the public can more intuitively feel the charm of Li Bing culture.

4.2 Promote the Creative Transformation of Li Bing Culture

Combine the water management wisdom of Li Bing culture with modern science and technology to promote the intelligent, informative and automated development of water conservancy projects. Utilize advanced technologies such as big data, cloud computing and Internet of Things to improve the monitoring, early warning and management level of water conservancy projects. Through the means of modern science and technology, Li Bing's water management concept can be applied more precisely, so that the ancient wisdom can play a greater role in contemporary water conservancy projects.

Combine Li Bing culture with cultural industry to develop cultural tourism products and cultural creative products with local characteristics. By creating Li Bing cultural tourism routes, tourists can not only visit Dujiangyan and other water conservancy projects, but also gain a deeper understanding of the connotation and value of Li Bing culture. At the same time, the development of Li Bing cultural derivatives, such as souvenirs, handicrafts and publications, can meet the needs of different consumers and expand the market influence of Li Bing culture.

In the process of promoting the creative transformation of Li Bing culture, it is also necessary to focus on the integration of culture and economy. Through the combination of culture and industry, it can not only promote the development of local economy, but also provide economic support for the inheritance and innovation of Li Bing culture. At the same time, it is necessary to encourage and support the development of cultural and creative enterprises to develop more innovative products based on the theme of Li Bing culture, so that Li Bing culture can be revitalized in modern society.

4.3 Strengthen the International Exchange and Cooperation of Li Bing Culture

International academic conferences and forums are regularly organized, inviting experts and scholars at home and abroad to discuss the historical background, spiritual connotation and innovative development path of Li Bing culture. Through international exchanges and cooperation, global wisdom can be gathered to provide diversified perspectives and innovative ideas for the inheritance and development of Li Bing culture. At the same time, it also helps to promote the internationalization of Li Bing culture and enhance its visibility and influence in the international arena.

Organize international cultural exchange activities, such as cultural exhibitions and cultural performances, to show the unique charm and value of Li Bing culture to the international community. Through these activities, it can enhance the international community's understanding and recognition of Li Bing culture, and promote exchanges and integration between different cultures. At the same time, it will strengthen the exchange and cooperation with foreign water conservancy experts and scholars, and jointly promote the development of global water conservancy. The wisdom and philosophical thinking of water management contained in Li Bing culture is an important revelation for solving global water resource problems and promoting sustainable development.

In the process of strengthening international exchanges and cooperation, it is also necessary to focus on the establishment of a long-term stable cooperation mechanism. Establish strategic partnerships with internationally renowned academic institutions and cultural organizations to jointly carry out research projects, talent training and cultural exchange activities. Through these cooperation, resource sharing and complementary advantages can be realized, providing a strong guarantee for the international dissemination and development of Li Bing culture.

4.4 Promote the Inheritance and Development of Li Bing Culture

Promoting the inheritance and development of Li Bing culture is the basic guarantee for realizing its innovative development. Strengthening the cultivation of talents is the key, and it is necessary to cultivate a group of Li Bing culture inheritors and researchers with both professionalism and innovation ability. By organizing training courses and seminars, the professionalism and innovation ability of the inheritors can be effectively improved. At the same time, universities and scientific research institutions are encouraged to offer relevant courses and research projects, so as to provide more professionals in the field of Li Bing culture research. It is equally important to improve the inheritance mechanism, which should be established and improved, including the inheritor system, inheritance base construction, inheritance of financial security, etc., to ensure that the inheritance and development of Li Bing culture is strongly guaranteed. The inheritor system helps to clarify the responsibility and obligation of inheritance, and the construction of inheritance base can provide a practical place and platform for cultural inheritance, while the inheritance fund guarantee supports the smooth development of inheritance work from the economic level.

4.5 Promoting the Deep Integration of Li Bing Culture and Ecological Civilization Construction

The water management wisdom of Li Bing culture emphasizes "learning from nature", which coincides with the concept of modern ecological civilization. In promoting the construction of a water-saving society, the water management concept of Li Bing culture should be fully borrowed to strengthen the unified management of water resources, promote water-saving technology and equipment, and improve the utilization efficiency of water resources. For example, in the field of agriculture, efficient water-saving irrigation technologies such as drip irrigation and sprinkler irrigation should be promoted; in urban life, water-saving appliances should be promoted to encourage residents to save water.

Combining Li Bing culture with the construction of ecological civilization helps promote ecological restoration and environmental protection. Improve the quality of the ecological environment by strengthening ecological restoration projects, such as afforestation and wetland restoration. Green technologies and products are promoted to reduce the over-exploitation and destruction of natural resources and to realize the harmonious coexistence of man and nature. For example, in the Dujiangyan area, an ecotourism demonstration zone can be created on the basis of the Li Bing culture, and through the development of ecotourism, the benign interaction between local economic development and ecological protection can be promoted.

COMPETING INTERESTS

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THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION OF BASHU CULTURE UNDER THE BACKGROUND OF “BELT AND ROAD”

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Abstract: As an important part of Chinese civilization, Ba Shu culture has a long history and unique charm, and its international dissemination is of great significance in the context of “Belt and Road”. This study aims to explore how to promote Ba Shu culture to the world stage through innovation and collaboration. The study points out that the current dissemination of Ba Shu culture is mainly realized in three ways: first, cultural innovation, i.e., in-depth excavation and modernization of traditional cultural elements to develop more attractive cultural products; second, digital dissemination, with the help of the Internet, Big Data, Artificial Intelligence and other technologies, to break the limitations of time and space, so as to enable the Ba Shu culture to disseminate to the rest of the world in a wider and more rapid manner; and third, regional collaboration. The third is regional collaboration, which strengthens cultural exchanges and cooperation with countries and regions along the “Belt and Road” to form a synergy of cultural promotion. These three approaches are complementary and mutually reinforcing, and together they will contribute to the international dissemination of Ba Shu culture, giving it new vigor and vitality in the new era, and playing a positive role in promoting cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries and enhancing cultural soft power.

Keywords: Belt and Road; Ba Shu culture; International communication; Cultural innovation

1 INTRODUCTION

The “Belt and Road” is a major international strategic plan made by China to promote economic cooperation and cultural exchanges among countries along the route. As an important part of Chinese civilization, Ba Shu culture has a profound history and unique cultural charm. In the context of the “Belt and Road” strategy, promoting the international dissemination of Ba Shu culture can not only enhance China's cultural soft power, but also promote cultural exchanges with the countries along the route. Therefore, this study focuses on the international communication strategies and paths of Ba Shu culture in the “Belt and Road” strategy.

Ba Shu culture has a long history and unique charm. Ba Shu culture is a regional culture in the Sichuan Basin of China, with Ba culture and Shu culture as the main body, including the common culture of various ethnic groups in the basin. Ba Shu culture has obvious regional characteristics and is an important part of Chinese culture. During the Paleolithic era, the Ba Shu region was already home to the activities of the ancestors, and is one of the birthplaces of Chinese civilization. In particular, the discovered Sanxingdui and Jinsha cultures have amazed the world; Li Bai, the “Poetry Immortal” of the Tang Dynasty, grew up in Ba Shu; Du Fu, the “Sage of Poetry”, lived there for a long time; and the “Three Su” of the Song Dynasty were famous for generations to come. The literature and art of Ba Shu have left a heavy mark in the history of Chinese civilization. The multi-ethnic humanities, humanistic landscapes, geographic environment and gastronomic culture of Ba Shu attract the attention of the world. The long history and cultural heritage of Ba Shu, the famous Sichuan cuisine, and the unique natural scenery provide rich materials and a solid foundation for the international dissemination of Ba Shu culture.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Ba Shu culture shows multi-dimensional academic value and application potential in animated movie and wine research. Chen et al.'s study focuses on the integration of local cultural elements in animated films, which is considered an important way to realize the creative transformation and innovative development of local culture. Because of its distinctive features and rich connotations, Ba Shu culture has become a favored target for creators of animation films. However, the current works, such as “The Descent of Nezha” and “Kung Fu Panda”, mostly focus on “experiential elements” such as Ba Shu dialect, scenery and dishes, and there are problems such as a single list of elements and misinterpretation and misuse of elements [1]. In this regard, combining domestic and international classic cases, digging deep into the elements of Ba Shu culture to build character stories, grasping the pulse of the times to innovate character stories, and conveying the spirit of Ba Shu around character stories will provide a practical path for animated films to inherit and innovate the culture of Ba Shu, and to tell a good Chinese story. At the same time, Zhou's study of the Ba Shu wine industry found that the academic community is currently focused on the identification of the origin of wine, the development and evolution of the statement as well as the local representative of the wine industry on the individual study, while the regional distribution and dissemination of the study is relatively scarce. Through the excavation of historical materials such as Bamboo Words, Zhou found that during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the wine culture in the land of Ba Shu had been widely spread and widely distributed, with Jincheng as the center, radiating to the surrounding area to form a ring-shaped distribution of the drinking culture circle. Its culture spread mainly through

commercial behavior and the poetry of literati [2]. This shows that both the use of cultural elements in animated movies and the study of Ba Shu wine industry are exploring how local culture can be inherited, innovated and developed in different fields, which provides rich academic perspectives and practical paths for the diversified presentation and value excavation of Ba Shu culture.

Under the background of rapid development of science and technology, cultural communication has ushered in unprecedented opportunities. Chen's study focuses on the current situation of Ba Shu culture communication in the new media environment, and finds that the development of science and technology has not only enriched the subject of communication, expanded the channels and forms of communication, but also significantly improved the effect of cultural communication. Through an in-depth analysis of the communication of Ba Shu culture in the new media environment, Chen proposes a series of optimization strategies, including making full use of the communication advantages of the new media platform, integrating the communication resources, as well as innovating the presentation form of Ba Shu culture with the help of the new media technology, and focusing on the excavation and refinement of the cultural symbols, so as to optimize the existing communication environment [3]. These strategies aim to promote the communication of Ba Shu culture in the new media environment into a new stage, so that its far-reaching value can be fully realized. Meanwhile, Zhang and Huang's study analyzed in depth the dissemination of Ba Jin's literary work *Home* in Russia, Japan and Germany from the perspective of translation geography. Their study shows that the element of human geography plays a crucial role in the dissemination process of the work [4]. This study not only reveals the reasons for the different dissemination effects of *The Family* in different countries, but also provides a brand-new perspective for the overseas dissemination of Ba Shu culture as well as the international promotion of Chinese culture. Together, these two studies provide valuable theoretical support and practical guidance for the dissemination and development of Ba Shu culture, and help to further enhance the influence and international status of Ba Shu culture.

The "One Belt, One Road" initiative has effectively promoted the spread of Chinese culture, including Ba Shu culture, by strengthening cultural exchanges, promoting cultural soft power, and fostering an international shared cultural space. The "One Belt, One Road" initiative has strengthened China's cultural self-confidence and promoted global harmony and community of destiny through cultural exchanges [5]. The "One Belt, One Road" initiative can effectively spread Chinese folk culture abroad, highlighting the need for effective communication strategies and solving current problems in international communication [6]. The "One Belt, One Road" initiative effectively spreads Chinese culture, enhances China's soft power in Asian countries along the route, and is conducive to China's economy and image building [7]. "The Belt and Road Initiative aims to spread Chinese culture and civic values, promote modern China, and reduce stereotypes of its worldview and lifestyle [8].

3 IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

As an important strategy for China's all-round development, the "Belt and Road" initiative is not only a dream of "going out" in science and technology and economy, but also a dream of "going out" in culture. As an important part of Chinese civilization, Ba Shu culture, with its long history and unique charm, has an indispensable role in the construction of the "Belt and Road".

First of all, the international dissemination of Ba Shu culture can enrich the cultural resources of the "Belt and Road". It has a long history and unique charm, covering many fields such as literature, art, folklore, food, etc. For example, Ba Jin's literary works, Sichuan Opera, Shu embroidery, hot pot culture, etc. These cultural elements not only have a deep heritage, but also have strong regional characteristics and attraction. By spreading Ba Shu culture in the countries along the "Belt and Road", it can provide more diversified cultural experiences for the people in the countries along the route, promote exchanges and integration of different cultures, and make the "Belt and Road" not only a link for economic cooperation but also a bridge of cultural exchanges.

Secondly, Ba Shu culture has a high degree of recognition and cognition in the countries along the Belt and Road, and can become a bridge for cultural communication between the two sides. Its unique cultural symbols and elements have a certain influence in the international arena, such as the giant pandas and Dujiangyan, etc. These cultural symbols are not only representatives of Ba Shu culture, but also symbols of Chinese culture. Taking these cultural symbols as an entry point, it is easier to arouse the interest and resonance of the people of the countries along the routes, thus promoting deeper cultural exchanges and cooperation, and enhancing mutual understanding and friendship among the people of the countries.

In addition, promoting the international dissemination of Ba Shu culture can help to enhance the understanding and recognition of Chinese civilization among the residents along the routes. Culture is the bloodline and soul of a nation. Through the dissemination of Ba Shu culture, people in the countries along the routes can more intuitively feel the depth and origin of Chinese civilization, and enhance their sense of identity and closeness to Chinese culture. Such cultural identification will further promote people-to-people communication, create a favorable humanistic environment for the construction of the "Belt and Road", and promote the in-depth development of economic cooperation.

In addition, the international dissemination of Ba Shu culture is of great significance in enhancing the international influence and soft power of Chinese culture. In the era of globalization, cultural soft power has become an important part of a country's comprehensive strength. By displaying the unique charm of Ba Shu culture on the international stage, it can enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of Chinese culture, shape China's open, tolerant and diversified cultural image, and make positive contributions to the global dissemination of Chinese culture.

Finally, from the perspective of regional development, the international dissemination of Ba Shu culture can promote exchanges and cooperation between Ba Shu region and countries along the “Belt and Road” in various aspects, such as economy, culture and tourism, and bring new opportunities and impetus to regional economic development. At the same time, it also helps to strengthen cultural exchanges and collaboration between the Ba Shu region and other regions, and jointly promote the inheritance and innovation of Chinese culture.

4 SUGGESTIONS FOR COUNTERMEASURES

4.1 Cultural Innovation of Ba Shu Culture

Cultural innovation is an important driver of the international dissemination of Ba Shu culture. First, create a research center for the international dissemination of Ba Shu culture to gather experts and scholars in Sichuan, Chongqing and around the world who like Ba Shu culture to study the international dissemination of Ba Shu culture. Through in-depth excavation of the origin, development, and innovation of Ba Shu culture, we will find the unique value and charm of Ba Shu culture, and lay a theoretical and material foundation for the international dissemination of Ba Shu culture. Second, expand the international circle of friends and strengthen cultural exchanges and cooperation with them. Strengthen cooperation with international academic research groups, universities and cultural organizations to introduce their advanced concepts and means to promote the innovative development of Ba Shu culture. In addition, we will strengthen international exchanges, go out to show the unique charm of Ba Shu culture, and make Ba Shu culture well-known. Thirdly, to combine Ba Shu culture with real life. Integrate the theoretical achievements of Ba Shu culture into people's cultural life, economic development and recreational activities, especially in campuses, communities and enterprises, and vigorously disseminate the traditional Chinese culture represented by Ba Shu culture, so as to continuously improve its influence and appeal. Only by integrating Ba Shu culture into people's lives can Ba Shu culture go global.

4.2 Digital communication of Ba Shu culture

Digital communication is an important means to enhance the international communication of Ba Shu culture. First, establish a digital platform to promote the international dissemination of Ba Shu culture. Build official websites and social media accounts to release real-time consulting and related information about Ba Shu culture and attract the attention of people at home and abroad. Make good use of the built platform to carry out online cultural activities at the right time to promote the real-time dissemination of Ba Shu culture. Secondly, tell the story of Ba Shu well and innovate the digital narrative. Make good use of digital technology and virtual means to present the stories of Ba Shu culture, historical celebrities and natural landscapes to the world in vivid images to enhance the attractiveness of Ba Shu culture. Integrate international cultural and aesthetic differences, and integrate Chinese and foreign cultures to create a culture with Ba Shu characteristics that is conducive to international understanding and reception. Thirdly, we will utilize multimedia means for international promotion. Produce and publish videos, audios and pictures of Ba Shu culture to attract the attention and interest of domestic and foreign audiences. Make good use of the produced audio and video to promote and publicize internationally, so as to make the popularity of Ba Shu culture higher.

4.3 Regional Collaboration of Ba Shu Culture

Strengthen the regional collaboration of Ba Shu culture to realize win-win development. First, collaborate and synergize to seek common development. Integrate the cultural resources as well as academic strengths of Sichuan and Chongqing, and work together to deepen the research and exploration. Strengthen cultural exchanges and cooperation between Sichuan and Chongqing, and jointly organize the Ba Shu Cultural Exhibition and Ba Shu Academic Annual Meeting to promote the inheritance and development of Ba Shu culture. Second, to build an international academic exchange platform to promote the prosperity of Ba Shu culture. Regularly organize international exchange activities and invite famous experts and scholars at home and abroad to discuss and exchange ideas. Strengthen cooperation with internationally renowned academic institutions to promote the innovation and development of Ba Shu culture. Thirdly, we will build a spiritual home and enhance people's cultural literacy. Taking the satisfaction of the people's demand for culture as the starting point, we will carry out in-depth work on the entry of Ba Shu culture into their homes, and improve the people's recognition of Ba Shu culture and their cultural literacy. The core essence of Ba Shu culture will be selected to perpetuate history and guard cultural heritage and cultural landmarks. In this way, we will promote Ba Shu culture to gradually penetrate into people's hearts and go to the world stage.

COMPETING INTERESTS

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EXPLORING DYNAMIC INHERITANCE STRATEGIES FOR INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE HUAIHAI REGION: A CULTURAL IDENTITY APPROACH

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Abstract: This research delves into the strategies for the dynamic preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in the Huai area, focusing on the role of cultural identity. It examines the current status of ICH in the Huai region, highlighting the challenges posed by rapid urbanization and industrialization, and the need for innovative transmission methods. The study aims to develop effective strategies for the dynamic preservation of ICH, integrating cultural heritage into social development to boost regional cultural strength and economic growth.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage; Huai region; Vital transmission; Cultural identity; Cultural identity; Cultural transmission strategies

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

As the process of globalization accelerates and modernization advances, the inheritance and protection of intangible cultural heritage have received widespread attention from the international community. The Huaihai region is an important "intangible cultural heritage area" in China. Inheriting intangible cultural heritage in a living state is a crucial means to enhance China's cultural soft power. Currently, the social environment for the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region exhibits a diverse and complex situation: In terms of policy support, the state places great emphasis on the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, issuing a series of policies and regulations that provide a solid policy foundation and guarantee for the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region. Local authorities also actively respond to national policies, increasing support for local intangible cultural heritage projects, formulating specific measures in areas such as financial investment, talent cultivation, and promotion, providing strong support for the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. On the economic development front, the continuous economic growth of the Huaihai region has provided a material foundation for the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. With the improvement of economic levels, people's demand for cultural consumption is growing, and their attention to intangible cultural heritage products and services is increasing, which offers broad prospects for the industrial development and market expansion of intangible cultural heritage. However, economic development also brings some challenges. Rapid urbanization and industrialization have impacted traditional production and lifestyle practices on which intangible cultural heritage relies, leading to issues such as the occupation of heritage sites and the loss of heritage bearers. In the realm of cultural atmosphere, the Huaihai region boasts a rich historical and cultural heritage. The local people have a strong sense of identity and pride in their indigenous culture, which fosters a favorable cultural environment for the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. The abundant historical and cultural resources and folk traditions within the region provide fertile ground for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. People have a deep emotional foundation and cultural recognition for local intangible cultural heritage projects.

Currently, the development of intangible cultural heritage industries in the Huaihai region faces numerous challenges. In terms of inheritance, the transmission of intangible cultural heritage typically relies on master-apprentice relationships and family traditions. However, in modern society, young people's lifestyles, values, and career choices have undergone significant changes. Many young people in the Huaihai region prefer to develop in big cities or pursue careers in modern industries, showing little interest or enthusiasm for the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, leading to a severe talent gap. At the same time, inheritors hold low economic and social status. The transmission of intangible cultural heritage requires a substantial investment of time and effort from the inheritors, but many projects fail to generate substantial economic returns. Inheritors often live in poverty, facing significant financial pressures that prevent them from fully dedicating themselves to the inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage. Additionally, society's recognition and respect for intangible cultural heritage inheritors are insufficient, leaving them without the social status and honor they deserve, which also affects young people's enthusiasm for inheriting intangible cultural heritage. In terms of the inheritance environment, on one hand, the cultural ecosystem has deteriorated. With the rapid development of industrialization and urbanization, intangible cultural heritage has lost its original living space and cultural soil. On the other hand, modern culture has had a strong impact. In the context of globalization and informatization, young people are more likely to embrace fashionable and novel modern cultures, lacking understanding

and recognition of traditional intangible cultural heritage. Regarding protection and development mechanisms, the preservation and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage require substantial financial support, including the training of inheritors, research on intangible cultural heritage projects, and the construction of cultural venues. However, the economic development level in the Huaihai region is relatively low, and social investment in intangible cultural heritage is limited. This has led to many intangible cultural heritage projects being unable to receive effective protection and inheritance due to a lack of funds. At the same time, during the development and utilization of intangible cultural heritage, there are issues such as over-commercialization and blind exploitation. Some places, in pursuit of economic benefits, have improperly packaged and transformed intangible cultural heritage, causing it to lose its original cultural connotations and artistic value.

To address the current issues and explore effective strategies for living heritage transmission, this paper will delve into the dynamic inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region from the perspective of cultural identity. The research primarily includes understanding the relationship between cultural identity and intangible cultural heritage, analyzing the current status of intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region, exploring effective strategies for living heritage transmission, establishing an effective inheritance mechanism, and promoting the integration of cultural heritage with social development.

1.2 Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region. By researching and inheriting the intangible cultural heritage of the Huaihai region, it aims to promote public recognition and pride in local culture. It seeks to enhance public awareness and attention to intangible cultural heritage, stimulating their enthusiasm for participating in its protection and inheritance, thereby strengthening regional cultural cohesion. The study also aims to gain a deep understanding of the current status and challenges faced by intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region, proposing scientifically sound and reasonable conservation measures. This ensures that intangible cultural resources are properly protected, avoiding destruction or loss due to urbanization and modern cultural impacts. It explores dynamic inheritance strategies suitable for the intangible cultural heritage of the Huaihai region, innovating methods and means of inheritance. This will help maintain the vitality of intangible cultural heritage in modern society, achieving sustainable development. The study also seeks to leverage the role of intangible cultural heritage in economic development, promoting its integration with creative industries and tourism. Developing regionally distinctive intangible cultural heritage products and services will boost regional economic growth, achieving a positive interaction between culture and the economy. Additionally, it provides new perspectives and case studies for the research and practice of intangible cultural heritage in other regions, enriching the theoretical framework for its protection and inheritance.

1.3 Research Significance

1.3.1 Theoretical significance

(1) Deepen the theory of cultural identity

Cultural identity is the sense of recognition and belonging that individuals or groups have towards a particular culture and its values. The living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region can further enrich and develop theories of cultural identity: by continuously passing on and showcasing the cultural essence of the Huaihai region, people can gain a clearer understanding of their cultural identity, encouraging them to more consciously protect and inherit the culture of the Huaihai region in their daily lives; at the same time, it can strengthen the younger generation's sense of recognition and belonging to local culture, enhancing intergenerational transmission of cultural identity and injecting vitality into cultural innovation and development; as a historically significant area of cultural convergence, the intangible cultural heritage of the Huaihai region contains rich and diverse cultural connotations. Living inheritance of these intangible cultural heritage projects can promote the integration and coexistence of different cultural elements, forming unique cultural landscapes.

1.3.2 Practical significance

(1) Promote the inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage in modern society, and promote cultural diversity and cultural prosperity

The Huaihai region boasts a rich intangible cultural heritage, which is substantial and well-structured. By leveraging the critical role of bearers, it preserves and passes on the unique value of regional culture. Combined with innovative applications of digital technology, this approach attracts broad participation from all sectors of society. Not only does it ensure the transmission of intangible cultural skills from generation to generation, but it also significantly promotes the development of cultural diversity and the prosperity of local culture. It can protect some unique forms of cultural expression and prevent cultural homogenization.

(2) Enhance the cultural soft power of Huaihai region and promote the development of regional economic and cultural industries

The living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region, through in-depth exploration and display of unique cultural resources, not only enhances the cultural soft power of the Huaihai region and boosts regional cultural confidence and influence, but also, by closely integrating with tourism, transforms intangible cultural heritage into attractive cultural products. This promotes the development of the local economic and cultural industries, building a

distinctive cultural and tourism system for the Huaihai region. At the same time, integrating intangible cultural heritage into public service systems subtly permeates society, enriches the content of public cultural services, and improves service quality. This further facilitates the mutual promotion and common development of culture and economy, injecting new vitality into the economic prosperity and cultural revitalization of the Huaihai region.

1.4 Research Methods

This paper not only employs a mixed methods approach but also combines quantitative and qualitative research methods. At the same time, advanced data analysis tools (such as text mining, sentiment analysis, social network analysis, etc.) are used to conduct in-depth analysis of the collected data, uncovering patterns and trends.

(1) Literature Review Method: Extensively collect and study documents on the dynamic inheritance, protection, and development of intangible cultural heritage both domestically and internationally. Gain an initial understanding of research progress and current status in this field, and distill the theories and research methods involved. At the same time, read extensively to gather relevant news about the Huaihai region, analyzing its own resource conditions, macro policy directions, and the current state of intangible cultural heritage inheritance and development, forming a theoretical foundation for subsequent analysis.

(2) Questionnaire Survey Method: Design an online questionnaire covering issues related to the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region, and publish it on selected online platforms. The content will involve different levels of public interest, awareness, understanding, satisfaction, and perception of the revitalization of intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region. Subsequently, use SPSS to conduct descriptive statistics, cross-analysis, factor analysis, and correlation analysis on the questionnaire data to provide data support for subsequent research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Historical Development of Research

The study of intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region started relatively early, initially focusing on the documentation and organization of traditional culture. In the 1980s, with the growing awareness of intangible cultural heritage protection at the national level, related research gradually increased. In 1993, UNESCO introduced the concept of "intangible cultural heritage." Against this backdrop, researchers in the Huaihai region began systematic investigations and studies of local intangible cultural heritage. In 1996, the Jiangsu Provincial Department of Culture launched the "Jiangsu Intangible Cultural Heritage Census" project, marking the official start of intangible cultural heritage research in the region.

In 2001, intangible cultural heritage began to gradually enter the research scope of universities. In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; in August 2004, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress approved the decision to ratify UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. By September 2006, China's "ICH" Protection Center was officially established, marking the establishment of a formal national research and protection institution for ICH in China. In 2009, Xuzhou City founded the Huaihai Region Intangible Cultural Heritage Research Center. Geng Li [1-2] focused on the construction of characteristic collections of excellent traditional culture in the Huaihai region, which can be related to the preservation and research of intangible cultural heritage materials in this area. The first and second "China·Xuzhou Intangible Cultural Heritage High-Level Forums" were held in November of the same year and May 2012, respectively. These forums promoted ICH through academic reports, discussions, exhibitions of ICH projects, and cultural investigations, among other activities, to participants.

2.2 Main Theories of the Study

2.2.1 Intangible cultural heritage

According to the definition of UNESCO, this study defines intangible cultural heritage according to the "Opinion on Strengthening the Protection of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage" issued in 2005: social practices, concepts, knowledge, skills and related tools, objects and places regarded as part of their cultural heritage by communities, groups and individuals.

2.2.2 Living inheritance theory

This concept originates from the understanding of the essential characteristic of intangible cultural heritage being "living." Due to the living nature of intangible cultural heritage, its rational utilization can be seen as living inheritance. At the Huizhou Culture Protection Forum in 2008 [3], Qi Qingfu first proposed the concept of "living inheritance," emphasizing that intangible cultural heritage should be inherited and developed in its original environment and within the lives and production activities of the people. Meanwhile, the work of protection and inheritance should also take place in the original environment where it was born and evolved, involving the importance and support for representative inheritors of intangible cultural heritage projects and the productive protection of intangible cultural heritage.

2.2.3 Cultural identity theory

Cultural identity is a consensus and recognition of cultural tendencies. This theory focuses on the sense of cultural belonging among individuals and groups, emphasizing the importance of cultural inheritance for social cohesion. By analyzing the local residents' recognition of intangible cultural heritage, it explores its role in enhancing cultural confidence and social solidarity in the Huaihai region.

2.3 Research Methods Used in the Past

(1) Literature Analysis Method: By analyzing historical documents, local gazetteers, and folk customs, this method explores the historical background and development trajectory of intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region. In his study on the coupling mechanism between intangible cultural heritage and the tourism industry, Qiu Chen used the literature analysis method to define the concepts of intangible cultural heritage and the tourism industry, and to elaborate on relevant research theories [4]. The study involves reviewing local gazetteers from the Huaihai region to analyze the evolution of traditional festival activities and their cultural connotations.

(2) Questionnaire Survey and Interview Method: Through in-depth interviews and questionnaire surveys with intangible cultural heritage bearers, participants, and relevant community members, the scope of indicators for literature analysis and preliminary selection of indicators based on basic data analysis were determined. The research scale and survey questionnaire were established through pre-research and revision of the questionnaire, and formal surveys were conducted using the official questionnaire to provide investigative support for the dynamic inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. By interviewing local folk artists, a more detailed understanding of the target audience's thoughts and feelings can be gained, as well as how they maintain the vitality of traditional skills in modern society.

3 CURRENT SITUATION ANALYSIS

3.1 Policy Support

In the Huaihai region, since 2005 [5], Lianyungang City has initiated intangible cultural heritage protection efforts, establishing a four-level project list and representative inheritor system at the national, provincial, municipal, and county levels. Local authorities are responsible for protecting intangible cultural heritage, coordinating work through a departmental joint meeting system, and incorporating heritage protection into socio-economic development plans and urban-rural construction plans to ensure funding for conservation. The "Implementation Measures for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Huai'an City" defines intangible cultural heritage and outlines specific measures for its protection, such as integrating conservation efforts into national economic and social development plans, establishing a departmental joint meeting system, and regularly conducting surveys on intangible cultural heritage.

3.2 Changes in Growth Environment

Traditional markets play a crucial role in the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, offering people opportunities to experience and feel it firsthand. However, spatial limitations of transmission centers and the rapid development of online media have posed challenges to the spread and development of traditional art forms like Huaihai Opera. For instance, intangible cultural heritage transmission centers often function as studios for inheritors, with limited space that is not conducive to long-term visits, making them more suitable for showcasing simple intangible skills or small crafts. Influenced by modern film and television culture and changes in lifestyle, new leisure activities continue to emerge. Meanwhile, the widespread use of modern electronic media such as radio, television, movies, and the internet has led to increasingly diverse cultural consumption needs among the public, gradually reducing interest in traditional arts like Huaihai Opera, posing severe challenges to their dissemination and development. Luo Yunmao and Xiao Wei analyzed the inheritance and innovation of intangible cultural heritage in the digital era [6]. Their research on the challenges and opportunities in the digital age is relevant to the situation of intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region, which may offer some solutions to the current problems. Additionally, while commercial exhibitions and sales provide income for intangible cultural heritage inheritors, excessive commercialization can lead to the neglect of the essence of intangible skills, limiting their deep inheritance.

4 THEORETICAL MODEL CONSTRUCTION AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

4.1 Theoretical Model Construction

Based on social cognition theory, cultural identity theory and value chain theory, this study constructs a theoretical model of "cultural identity--dynamic inheritance mechanism--inheritance performance".

The model centers on the concept of "cultural identity," exploring residents' level of cultural recognition from three dimensions: cognition, emotion, and behavior. By quantifying these three concepts, it aims to quantify the impact mechanism of the independent variable, cultural identity, on the dependent variable—the transmission chain from the "living inheritance mechanism to inheritance performance." Cultural identity refers to an individual or group's sense of belonging, emotional dependence, and awareness of consciously maintaining and practicing specific culture (such as intangible cultural heritage values, symbols, traditions, skills, and lifestyles). It is the core mechanism for the survival of

intangible cultural heritage and also the "driving force" behind its transmission. "Cognitive identity" refers to an individual's level of recognition of culture, specifically their understanding and acceptance of the value of intangible cultural heritage; "emotional identity" refers to emotional attachment and a sense of belonging to intangible cultural heritage; "behavioral identity" refers to whether an individual engages in cultural practices.

"The living inheritance mechanism" serves as the intermediary between "cultural identity" and "inheritance performance," acting as a variable that facilitates communication between the two. Residents' sense of identity with intangible cultural heritage is primarily reflected in their level of understanding, emotional attachment, and participation enthusiasm, which in turn influences the performance of living inheritance. These three dimensions are the intermediate variables in this study, specifically referring to residents' comprehension and recognition of intangible cultural heritage, as well as their emotional sense of belonging to intangible cultural heritage and their active participation in related activities in daily life.

"Inheritance performance" can be quantified into two dimensions: "the activity of the inheriting entities" and "the continuity of cultural functions." The "performance" of intangible cultural heritage's "living inheritance" refers to the extent to which traditional intangible cultural skills are active in modern people's lives. This is achieved through continuous voluntary participation and innovative inheritance by residents, ensuring intergenerational transmission and preserving both the material form and living carriers of these skills. "The activity of the inheriting entities" indicates the enthusiasm of the inheriting entities (such as nationally certified inheritors and their communities) for the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, whether the skills can be actively passed down from generation to generation. "The continuity of cultural functions" means whether the cultural functions represented by traditional intangible cultural techniques keep up with the times and can maintain their core significance in contemporary society, continuing their original functions in daily life.

By constructing this model, this study has a clear logical basis for how "cultural identity" affects residents' attitudes and behaviors towards intangible cultural heritage, and then affects the performance of living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, which lays a solid foundation for subsequent quantitative analysis.

4.2 Research Hypothesis

This study puts forward the following hypotheses to explore the direct and indirect effects of cultural identity on intangible cultural heritage inheritance.

Main hypothesis:

Cognitive recognition → inheritance activity (H1)

Cognitive recognition of culture is conducive to the enhancement of the activity of intangible cultural heritage inheritance. The higher the residents' understanding of culture, the higher the activity of inheritance theme.

Emotional identity to cultural functional continuity (H2)

Emotional identity plays a role in promoting the functional continuity of culture. The stronger the residents' emotional sense of belonging to intangible cultural heritage, the stronger the continuity of cultural function in modern times.

Behavioral identity → Cultural functional continuity (H3)

Behavioral identity also plays a positive role in the functional continuity of intangible cultural heritage. With the increase of residents' enthusiasm and positivity, the functional continuity of culture will also be improved.

Passing on activity → Continuity of cultural function (H4)

There is also a correlation between the independent variables. The activity of cultural inheritance plays a role in promoting the continuity of cultural function

Hypotheses about the mediating variables:

Hypothesis of mediating effect of cognitive identification:

Cognitive identity improves residents' cognition of intangible cultural heritage, and affects the inheritance activity and continuity of cultural functions of intangible cultural heritage.

The mediating effect hypothesis of emotional identity: Emotional identity improves residents' cognition level of intangible cultural heritage, and affects the inheritance activity of intangible cultural heritage and the continuity of cultural function.

The mediating effect hypothesis of behavioral identity: Behavioral identity improves residents' cognition level of intangible cultural heritage, and affects the inheritance activity of intangible cultural heritage and the continuity of cultural function.

5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND SCALE DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Data Collection and Research Design

In order to fully grasp the current situation of living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage and provide a basis for formulating effective protection and development strategies, this study adopts the questionnaire survey method, which covers a wide range of local residents, tourists and other multiple social groups to ensure the diversity of samples.

5.2 Scale Development and Test of Reliability and Validity

5.2.1 Pre-survey test of letter validity

In the preliminary survey, 20 questionnaires were distributed, and 1 invalid questionnaire was eliminated, leaving 19 valid questionnaires (Table 1).

Table 1 Reliability Test of Pre-Research

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Terms
.913	12

As can be seen from the above table, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is 0.913 (>0.8), which indicates that the internal consistency of the questionnaire is excellent and the 12 items are highly correlated (Table 2).

Table 2 Pre-Research Validity Test

Sample the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure sufficiently.	.732
Approximate chi-square	134.082
Bartlett Sphericity test	free degree
	55
conspicuousness	.000

The KMO value was 0.732 (>0.7) and the Bartlett spherical test was significant ($p=0.000$), indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis and had good validity.

5.2.2 Formal questionnaire test of construct validity

Confidence interval (Z value): 95% confidence interval, Z value is 1.96.

Error range (E): The error range is set to 10%.

Estimation ratio (p): Assume the ratio is 0.5.

Substitute the sample size calculation formula:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p)}{E^2} \quad (1)$$

The required sample size was 96. In order to make the data more credible, we distributed 108 formal questionnaires.

In view of the fact that the number of formal questionnaire samples is much larger than that of pre-research samples, we adopt the method of dimensional test of reliability and validity to consider the independence of research constructs and the depth of data analysis (Table 3-4).

Table 3 Formal Questionnaire 2.4.5.6.7 Item Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Terms
.799	5

Table 4 Reliability Analysis of 11 Questions in the Formal Questionnaire and Other Evaluation Questions

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Terms
.940	7

It can be seen from the above data that the Cronbach's Alpha of questions 2.4.5.6.7 in the formal questionnaire was 0.799 (>0.7), and the internal consistency was up to standard; while the Cronbach's Alpha of questions 11 was 0.940 (>0.9), and the reliability was excellent (Table 5-6).

Table 5 Formal Questionnaire 2.4.5.6.7 Item Validity Analysis

Sample the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure sufficiently.	.756
Approximate chi-square	191.614
Bartlett Sphericity test	free degree
	10
conspicuousness	.000

Table 6 Formal Questionnaire 11 Questions and Other Evaluation Test Validity Analysis

Sample the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure sufficiently.	.912
---	------

	Approximate chi-square	621.128
Bartlett Sphericity test	free degree	21
	conspicuousness	.000

From the above data, it can be seen that the KMO for questions 2.4.5.6.7 of the formal questionnaire is 0.756 (>0.7) and the Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant ($p=0.000$), indicating that the data are suitable for factor analysis with good validity; while the KMO for question 11, which is an evaluation question, is 0.912 (>0.9) and the Bartlett's test of sphericity is also significant ($p=0.000$), suggesting that the data are highly suitable for factor analysis.

5.3 Sample Characteristic Analysis

(1) Descriptive statistical analysis and demographic characteristics

In terms of gender distribution, our respondents are mainly female, accounting for 81.48%, while male accounts for 18.52%; in terms of age structure, the group aged 18-25 accounts for the absolute majority (82.41%, 89 people), followed by those under 18 (11.11%, 12 people), and those over 26 account for less than 6%.

At the same time, 83.33% (90 people) of the sample have associate or bachelor's degrees, while only 6.48% (7 people) have master's degrees or higher. In terms of occupational composition, students account for as high as 92.59% (100 people), with other occupational groups (such as corporate employees and freelancers) totaling less than 8%. 80.56% (87 people) earn less than 3000 yuan per month, consistent with the high proportion of student groups in the occupational distribution.

From the above, it can be seen that only 5.56% (6 people) indicated "very familiar," while 37.96% (41 people) were "somewhat familiar" or "not at all familiar" (a total of 46.29%). Regarding the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region, the main channels of information are online radio (45.37%), short video live streaming (43.52%), and television reports (39.81%) (Table 7).

Table 7 Test of Normality

	N	skewness	kurtosis
	statistics	statistics	The standard is wrong
@2	108	.401	.233
@4	108	.589	.233
@5	108	-.479	.233
@6	108	.145	.233
@7	108	-.054	.233
@11.1	107	-.552	.234
@11.2	108	-.693	.233
@11.3	108	-.610	.233
@11.4	108	-.421	.233
@11.5	108	-.285	.233
@11.6	108	-.592	.233
@11.7	108	-.615	.233
Number of effective cases (in columns)	107		

The skewness of each group of data is close to 0, and all are between -2 and 2, indicating that the data distribution is basically symmetrical and the skewness degree is small. The peakedness value is also close to 0 and between -2 and 2, indicating that the distribution shape of the data is close to the standard of normal distribution.

All groups have skewness values that do not significantly deviate from 0, and kurtosis values are also close to 0, indicating characteristics of a normal distribution. The data show no obvious skew or abnormal peaks, conforming to the features of an approximately normal distribution. In summary, based on the analysis of skewness and kurtosis, all group data meet the criteria for an approximately normal distribution.

6 EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS VERIFICATION

6.1 Descriptive Statistics and Variable Relationship Analysis

6.1.2 Correlation analysis

There was a significant positive correlation between all variables ($p < 0.01$).

Cognitive attitude (@4) is highly correlated with behavioral participation variables ($r = 0.579$ with activity interest (@5), $r = 0.524$ with performance satisfaction (@6), and $r = 0.529$ with participation experience (@7)), indicating that positive cognitive attitude is the core psychological factor driving participation behavior and satisfaction improvement.

The satisfaction of performance (@6) is strongly correlated with the experience (@7) ($r = 0.606$), indicating that the satisfaction and the on-site experience reinforce each other, which may form a positive feedback loop.

There is a strong correlation ($r \geq 0.6$) between facility evaluation variables (@11.1 to @11.7). The r of traffic road (@11.1) and guidance sign (@11.2) is 0.760, and the r of accommodation conditions (@11.5) and safety conditions (@11.7) is 0.786.

The understanding of intangible cultural heritage (@2) was moderately positively correlated with the evaluation variables of facilities ($r = 0.268 \sim 0.374$), indicating that the understanding of intangible cultural heritage may indirectly affect the perception and evaluation of supporting facilities.

The variables of performance satisfaction (@6), experience (@7) and facility evaluation were significantly correlated ($r = 0.374 \sim 0.612$). The improvement of infrastructure could enhance the participation experience, and then improve the overall satisfaction (Table 8).

Table 8 Testing Results of Hypotheses on Inheritance - Related Variables

hypothesis	way	Standardized coefficient (Beta)	p price	bear fruit
H1	Cognitive recognition (@2) -> Inheritance activity (@6)	0.089	0.266	nonsupport
H2	Emotional identification (@4) @7 Cultural functional continuity	0.529	<0.001	support
H3	Behavioral identity (@5) -> Cultural functional continuity (@7)	0.399	<0.001	support
H4	Inheritance activity (@6) -> Cultural function continuity (@7)	0.606	<0.001	support

H1 (cognitive identification to inheritance activity): The model was significant overall ($F = 29.345$, $p < 0.001$), with an explanatory power of 44.3% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.443$). Cognitive identification (@2) ($\text{Beta} = 0.089$, $p = 0.266$) had no significant effect.

H2 (emotional identification → cultural functional continuity): The model was significant ($F = 41.262$, $p < 0.001$), with an explanatory power of 27.3% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.273$). Emotional identification (@4) had a significant positive effect on cultural functional continuity ($\text{Beta} = 0.529$, $p < 0.001$).

H3 (Behavioral identification → Cultural functional continuity): The model was significant ($F = 20.121$, $p < 0.001$), with an explanatory power of 15.2% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.152$). Behavioral identification (@5) had a significant positive effect on cultural functional continuity ($\text{Beta} = 0.399$, $p < 0.001$).

H4 (Inheritance activity → Cultural function continuity): The model was significant ($F = 61.565$, $p < 0.001$), with an explanatory power of 36.1% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.361$). Inheritance activity (@6) had a significant positive effect on cultural

7 OPTIMIZATION STRATEGIES OF DYNAMIC INHERITANCE MECHANISM

7.1 Individual Optimization Path Based on Cultural Identity

From an individual perspective, this can be divided into two aspects: "education fostering interest" and "rewards incentivizing contribution." Implementing educational programs involves setting up courses related to intangible cultural heritage in primary and secondary schools, teaching relevant skills, and cultivating a strong interest in intangible cultural heritage among children. This promotes cognitive cultural identity and lays the foundation for emotional cultural identity. At the same time, by establishing incentive mechanisms, such as setting up special awards for intangible cultural heritage, individuals are encouraged to engage in the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage. Zhang Yan - gang et al. [7-8] studied the digital display design of intangible cultural heritage museums in the Huaihai region. Their findings can be used to enhance the educational effect of intangible cultural heritage at the individual level, for example, by making use of digital displays to attract more people to learn about intangible cultural heritage.

7.2 Community Level Inheritance Strategies

From the community level, make good use of community platforms to achieve an organic connection between intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and residents. In conjunction with the local characteristics of each community,

establish a community ICH center that regularly hosts ICH-themed events every month. This will develop into a base for the inheritance and display of ICH, promoting participation among community members and facilitating its integration into modern life. During special holidays, organize cultural celebration activities in the community, such as Guangxi's "March Third," incorporating ICH elements. Establish a mentorship system between ICH bearers and community members to achieve a dynamic mechanism of "one skill, one master, multiple apprentices," promoting the transmission of ICH knowledge and skills.

8 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

8.1 Research Conclusions

This study confirms the core role of cultural identity in the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in the Huaihai region, revealing from an empirical analysis perspective the rationality and scientific nature of the value chain "cultural identity—living inheritance mechanism—inheritance performance." At the same time, this study delves into how multi-faceted (cognitive, emotional, behavioral) cultural identity promotes the vitality of intangible cultural heritage inheritance and the continuity of cultural functions.

The research results emphasize the importance of enhancing cultural identity for improving the effect of intangible cultural heritage inheritance, and provide multiple strategies to enhance cultural identity from micro, meso and macro perspectives, providing a new perspective and strategy for the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

8.2 Innovation and Contribution

This study innovatively introduces the theory of cultural identity and applies it to the dynamic inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, exploring the relationship between the dynamic inheritance of intangible cultural heritage and local residents' cultural identity, analyzing the impact of cultural identity on the transmission of intangible cultural heritage. The research is committed to integrating with Chinese socialism, incorporating the regional characteristics of the Huaihai area to improve strategies for the dynamic inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in this region, making them more applicable and operational. Additionally, by constructing a theoretical model of "cultural identity-dynamic inheritance mechanism-inheritance performance," it also provides valuable references for intangible cultural heritage studies in other regions.

8.3 Research Limitations and Future Directions

This study needs further exploration in data processing. Advanced data analysis tools (such as text mining, sentiment analysis, social network analysis, etc.) can be used to conduct in-depth analysis of the collected data, so as to further explore the rules and trends.

In the future, interdisciplinary research methods can be adopted to explore more innovative ways of intangible cultural heritage inheritance to adapt to the changing social needs and challenges. Dagnino et al. [9-12] used serious games for intangible cultural heritage education. This innovative approach can be considered in future research on intangible cultural heritage inheritance in the Huaihai region, which may open up new paths for more effective inheritance.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE AND RESEARCH PROSPECTS OF YOUTH SUBCULTURE OF DESPONDENCY (2017–2024): A CITESPACE-BASED VISUALIZATION ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This study employs CiteSpace software to conduct keyword co-occurrence and clustering analyses of 215 scholarly articles on the Youth Subculture of Despondency published between 2017 and 2024. The findings indicate that research on the Youth Subculture of Despondency in China began relatively late and is still in an early developmental stage. The existing literature mainly focuses on three aspects: the unique stylistic features of despondency culture, its dissemination mechanisms in the new-media environment, and its potential impact on youth values. Based on these results, future research should proceed along two main directions. First, scholars should develop an indigenous theoretical framework of Youth Subculture of Despondency that is tailored to China's socio-cultural context. Second, research should investigate the connections between despondency culture and the actual life conditions of youth. These efforts aim to more effectively guide young people toward positive outlooks on life and values.

Keywords: Youth Subculture of Despondency; CiteSpace; Knowledge mapping; Visual analysis

1 INTRODUCTION

In the context of China's sustained high-speed economic growth, mechanisms for individuals to relieve psychological stress have not developed in parallel. Moreover, the instability of the external economic environment has triggered widespread anxiety and other mental health issues. In such a social atmosphere, the youth demographic in particular faces multiple challenges: a widening gap between ideals and reality, a sense of powerlessness in addressing social problems, and limited social mobility. Against this backdrop, a Youth Subculture of Despondency has emerged. The emergence of any culture is closely tied to factors such as the dissemination environment, the media, and the social background, since cultural transmission inevitably requires media [1]. With the rise of new online media and the Internet's inherent anonymity and virtuality, an increasing number of young people have turned to online platforms to release stress, express their true selves, and construct entirely new personal identities within relatively free virtual spaces. They do so by participating in topic discussions, online communities, and related forums.

The Youth Subculture of Despondency manifests as a mode through which young people employ self-deprecating humor and irony to alleviate the embarrassment of unfulfilled ambitions, vent inner dissatisfaction, and obtain a form of spiritual consolation [2]. It also serves as a strategy for building group identity and achieving self-protection among youth, effectively functioning as a countercultural effort to claim discursive space within mainstream society [3]. For example, the "Ge You tang" (literally "Ge You's slouch," referring to a reclining posture popularized by actor Ge You) phenomenon went viral in 2016; the "Fo xi" (literally "Buddha-like," denoting a detached or indifferent attitude) phenomenon gained traction in 2019; and in 2022 the terms "nei juan" ("involution") and "tang ping" ("lying flat") became widespread in youth discourse. These examples are all typical expressions of the Youth Subculture of Despondency.

To analyze this emerging field, the present study employs CiteSpace software to generate visual maps analyzing publication trends, research keywords, and co-cited references in the Youth Subculture of Despondency literature. The goal is to provide a comprehensive overview of the current research landscape and to offer informed recommendations for future research in this field.

2 METHODS

This study used CiteSpace (a software developed on the basis of mathematical and statistical analysis) to construct a scientific knowledge map of the literature on the Youth Subculture of Despondency. We employed methods such as keyword co-occurrence analysis, keyword cluster analysis, and co-citation analysis. These methods reveal the central topics of the field and the relationships among them, thereby illustrating the current research status and hotspots in China's Youth Subculture of Despondency, and enabling analysis of future research directions.

The data for this study were sourced from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) journal database. We searched for articles in Chinese journals using themes related to youth despondency culture. First, we defined two levels of search terms: the primary thematic keywords "Youth Subculture of Despondency" and "subculture of despondency", and secondary keywords representing specific typical cultures of interest, including "youth Fo xi culture" and "youth tang ping culture". The discipline categories were restricted to *Journalism and Communication*, *Culture*, *Sociology and Statistics*, and *Psychology*. After filtering out irrelevant content (such as newspapers and conference proceedings), we

obtained a final set of 215 valid journal articles on youth despondency culture. These articles form the basis of our bibliometric analysis (see Figure 1).

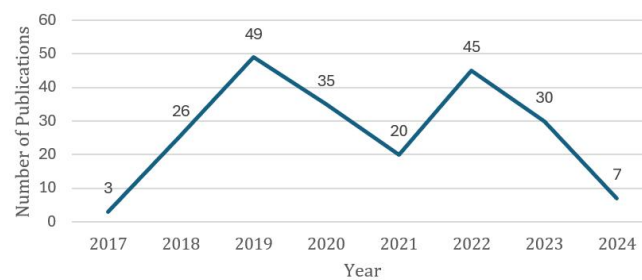


Figure 1 Annual Publication Volume of Chinese Youth Subculture of Despondency Research (2017–2024)

Figure 1 shows it is evident that research in this field started relatively late and is still in its nascent stage. From 2017 to 2024, the publication count exhibits a fluctuating trend. The viral spread of the “Ge You lounge” meme in July 2016 is often cited as the initial spark that brought Youth Nihilism Culture into the academic spotlight [4]. From 2017 to 2019, the number of publications showed an upward trend, which also coincided with a period of intensified research on youth subcultures in China [5]. The years 2019 and 2022 marked two publication peaks to date, both of which coincide with the emergence of popular online phenomena. The surge in 2019 correlates with the spread of the “Fo xi” trend, and the surge in 2022 aligns with the “tang ping” (lying flat) and “nei juan” (involution) phenomena in Chinese youth culture. This suggests that shifts in popular discourse and social mood are reflected in scholarly interest and publication rates.

3.1 Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

A keyword co-occurrence network (see Figure 2) was constructed from the 215 articles. This co-occurrence map reveals that terms such as “identity”, “social expectation”, “social mentality”, “internet culture”, “college student”, and “style” appear as high-frequency keywords in recent years. This indicates that contemporary research on Chinese youth despondency culture has focused on the internal psychology of young individuals during the process of self-identity formation, as well as the latent contradictions between this process and societal expectations.

The prominence of the concept of “style” highlights scholarly interest in how youth express despondency culture through particular lifestyles and consumption patterns. Additionally, the strong presence of “college student” as a keyword suggests that many studies target university students as their subject population – possibly because this group is both demographically concentrated and relatively accessible for research purposes [6]. The keyword “internet culture” underscores that the dissemination of youth despondency culture predominantly occurs via online platforms. The frequency of “identity” as a keyword suggests scholarly focus on youth self-definition. Sociological research notes that youth often face an “*identity crisis*” amid rapid social change, so subcultural practices provide ways to forge collective identity and meaning. The prominence of “social expectation” highlights normative pressures on Chinese youth, who are often saddled with family and societal hopes for career success. When such ideals collide with harsh reality, young people may experience anxiety and powerlessness, sometimes embracing despondent stances like “*tang ping*” as a coping strategy. Together, these keywords imply that researchers view youth despondency culture as a coping mechanism: young people negotiate between personal identity and social demands, finding solace in shared symbols and narratives.

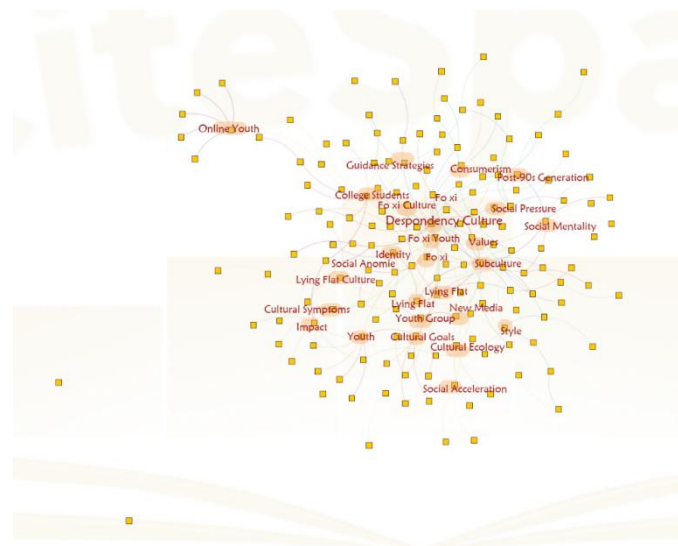


Figure 2 Keyword Co-occurrence Map of Chinese Youth Subculture of Despondency Research

3.2 Keyword Clustering Analysis

Building on the co-occurrence analysis, we employed the Log-Likelihood Ratio (LLR) method to perform keyword clustering, yielding a cluster map as shown in Figure 3. In total, nine key clusters were identified: #0 (despondency culture), #1 (youth group), #2 (lying flat), #3 (Fo xi youth), #4 (college student), #5 (social mentality), #6 (youth), #7 (style), and #8 (media dissemination) (see Figure 3).

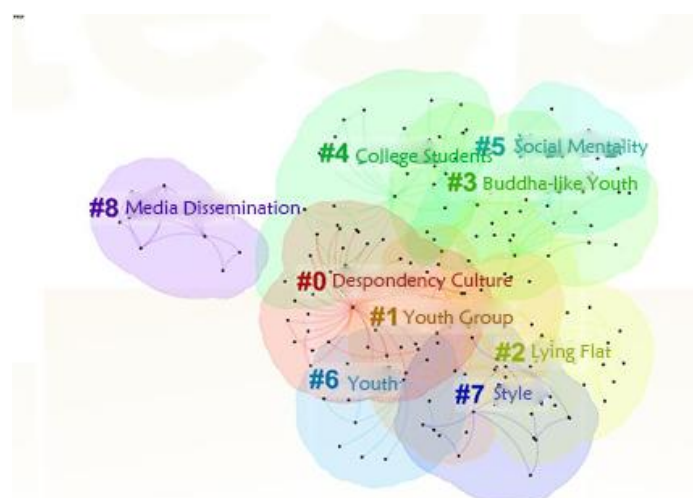


Figure 3 Keyword Cluster Map of Chinese Youth Subculture of Despondency Research

These clusters encapsulate the main thematic areas of current research. To clarify the thematic content of each cluster, we extracted representative keywords within each cluster and compiled them in Table 1.

Table 1 Research Topics or Fields Closely Associated with the Clusters

Cluster	Research Topics Closely Related to the Cluster
Despondency Culture	Youth groups, social pressure, college students, new media, consumerism
Youth Group	Despondency culture, Fo xi, values, identity, cultural goals
Tang Ping	Deep alienation, cultural symptoms, social acceleration, individualization, social anomie
Fo xi Youth	Religious mentality, religious nihilism, cultural ecology, ideological dilemma
College Students	Reflection, outlook on life, guidance, mental health, implicit attitudes
Social Mentality	College students, Fo xi youth, tang ping, post-90s generation
Style	Value orientation, meaning, identity, value confusion
Media Dissemination	Policy research, social work, cause analysis

To clarify the meaning of each cluster, we extracted representative keywords and summarized the key research content associated with each cluster. Removing redundant categories, we grouped the research focus into three main areas:

- **Style:** Stuart Hall, the father of contemporary cultural studies, argued that interpreting style is essentially interpreting a subculture. In the Chinese context, Youth Subculture of Despondency is an emerging youth subcultural phenomenon with a distinctive “nihilistic” style that sets it apart from other youth subcultures [4]. This style is manifested through creative remixing and collage of online elements such as text, images, and videos. It serves as a means for youth to express inner dissatisfaction and to “resist” the mainstream culture of positivity. Youth participants spread, mock, and imitate these contents, using self-mockery and carnival to vent their dissatisfaction and to find psychological comfort [2].

- **Cultural Identity and Resistance:** Youth Nihilism Culture functions to highlight the subjectivity of the youth group through self-expression and to build similarity and connection within the group. In doing so, youth construct a sense of identity and self-protection for themselves [7], effectively establishing a “third identity” in cyberspace beyond the realms of reality and imagination. This cultural identity is not a mere form of passive inaction. The popular nihilistic expressions among Chinese youth are often imbued with entertainment value; the verbal or even behavioral “giving up”

seen in Youth Nihilism Culture has not evolved into a Western-style group-level “withdrawal” [8]. Its essence is not opposition to mainstream values, but rather an attempt to find a harmonious coexistence with mainstream values through deconstruction. In other words, Youth Nihilism Culture represents a process of adapting within resistance and assimilating during deconstruction [9].

• **New Media:** In the new media era, advances in online technology and mobile devices – especially rapid improvements in graphic and video editing tools – have greatly lowered the barriers to creating Youth Nihilism Culture content. Under this backdrop, nihilistic cultural content is no longer tied to the ritualistic formality of older subcultures; it spreads more easily, with ever-lower entry thresholds and expanding reach. The broad reach and relative anonymity of new media platforms provide young people with a virtual space to simulate real life[9], enabling them to construct identities and forms of expression that may be difficult to achieve offline. This online space not only offers youth an outlet to vent suppressed or decadent emotions, but also becomes a venue for exploring self and social identity [10]. Commercial interests also exploit the influence of new media by promoting “giving up” and “lying flat” narratives. Some businesses attempt to leverage consumerism, materialism, and pessimistic worldviews to attract traffic and profit, potentially leading some youth to lose faith in the idea that “labor creates happiness and value,” and to become swept up in restless consumer trends [8]. Furthermore, Digital media platforms serve as catalysts that accelerate the visibility and cultural diffusion of such subcultures by amplifying youth narratives that challenge dominant discourses of success and productivity [11].

While these three thematic areas—style, cultural identity and resistance, and new media—capture the core content foci of existing studies, they also reveal a tendency to treat each dimension in relative isolation. In the next step, a closer look at the overall clustering structure shows that research on youth subculture of despondency remains somewhat fragmented, with little integration across clusters or engagement with root-cause analysis.

Several clusters focus on narrow topics or specific phenomena – for example, cluster #2 (“tang ping”) and #3 (“Fo xi youth”) correspond to particular viral terms, while cluster #4 (“college student”) isolates a demographic subgroup. Other clusters cover overlapping concepts (e.g. a general ‘youth’ cluster versus a more specific ‘youth group’ cluster), indicating segmented foci. This pattern implies that studies often examine these trends in isolation. Also, the absence of any cluster explicitly dedicated to root causes (such as economic or educational pressures) or to outcomes (such as well-being or career development) suggests that research has emphasized descriptive labels and identities over causal analysis.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This study provides a comprehensive bibliometric overview of research on the Youth Subculture of Despondency in China from 2017 through 2024. The analysis shows that the field is still emerging, with publications focusing on thematic aspects such as cultural style, media dissemination, and youth values. Key findings include the identification of major research topics (identity, social mentality, internet culture, etc.) and thematic clusters (style, identity/resistance, new media, and countermeasures). The publication trend reveals an initial rise in studies coinciding with viral youth cultural phenomena and a generally fluctuating but growing interest over time. Based on these insights, future research should advance along two primary lines:

Constructing Indigenous Theoretical Frameworks: Current scholarship on Chinese youth subcultures often relies on Western theories, which may not fully capture China’s socio-cultural background. Future scholars should build comprehensive theories of youth subculture that integrate perspectives from sociology, anthropology, communication, psychology, education, and aesthetics. In doing so, attention should be paid to the unique aspects of Chinese youth culture – for example, how terms like “bai lan” (a passive “give-up” attitude) and “tang ping” may outwardly express negativity yet often mask an underlying desire for personal development. Research indicates that even China’s post-90s generation, while pursuing a higher quality of life, generally maintains a spirit of self-improvement and pragmatism. By uncovering the Chinese spirit and resilience within youth subcultures, scholars can establish a research approach distinctive to China, help amplify China’s voice in international academia and portray a more positive image of Chinese youth. This will enable a more accurate grasp of developmental trends and facilitate strategies that promote the healthy development of youth culture.

Exploring Links to Youths’ Real-Life Conditions: While considerable work has analyzed the symbolic expressions of despondency culture, it is crucial to investigate whether these online phenomena accurately reflect young people’s offline experiences and life circumstances. Understanding the real-world impact of despondency culture requires tightly linking research to the actual lives of youth. Since 2016, the evolution of this culture – from “Ge You tang” to “Fo xi,” then “tang ping,” and most recently “bai lan” – suggests a deepening level of disillusionment and a shift of influence from purely psychological attitudes to behavioral change. Each stage represents a strategic adaptation to evolving pressures on labor, mobility, and identity within China’s digital economy. This lineage reveals how online subcultures have become important spaces for meaning-making, collective disillusionment, and symbolic withdrawal from high-intensity competition [12].

Moreover, the distinctive allure of internet subcultures can potentially divert attention away from mainstream positive values, indicating a need for innovative education and communication strategies. Such strategies should convey constructive values and life attitudes in ways that resonate with youth. By grounding analyses in the existing literature and social context, researchers and policymakers can develop evidence-based approaches to guide the Youth Subculture of Despondency toward healthier, more positive development paths.

In conclusion, the Youth Subculture of Despondency is a complex social phenomenon intertwined with contemporary Chinese society. A data-driven mapping of the literature shows emerging patterns and focal points in current scholarship. Moving forward, a combination of indigenous theory-building and attention to the lived realities of young people will be essential for fully understanding and responsibly guiding this cultural trend.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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WHO IS TO BLAME FOR THE OUTCOME OF *MACBETH*

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Abstract: This paper explores the attribution of blame for the tragic outcome in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. While Macbeth's unchecked ambition plays a central role, the responsibility is shared among several other figures and forces, including supernatural agents, Lady Macbeth, and King Duncan. Drawing on close textual analysis, literary devices, historical context, and intertextual references, the study argues that Shakespeare deliberately constructs a multilayered view of culpability, reflecting the political and metaphysical anxieties of the Jacobean era. The complexity of blame in *Macbeth* mirrors the early 17th-century tensions between free will and fate, individual agency and cosmic order.

Keywords: Tragedy; Ambition; Supernatural; Responsibility; Jacobean context; Moral conflict

1 INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* stands as a quintessential example of tragic drama that interrogates the nature of human agency, morality, and destiny. The play raises enduring questions: Who is ultimately responsible for the tragedy? Can the blame be solely placed on Macbeth, or is the culpability dispersed among other characters and unseen forces? Scholars have long debated the distribution of blame, and this paper contributes to that discourse by analyzing the roles of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, the witches, and King Duncan. In doing so, it seeks to illuminate how Shakespeare engages with political ideology, religious cosmology, and psychological depth to complicate notions of responsibility.

2 MACBETH'S AMBITION AND MORAL DISINTEGRATION

Macbeth's internal conflict is the most visible driver of the play's tragic outcome. At the start, he is lauded for his valor and loyalty—traits expected of a noble Thane. However, his vaulting ambition and moral equivocation set the stage for his downfall. Shakespeare uses jagged iambic pentameter to reflect Macbeth's psychological fragmentation, as seen in: "I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself / And falls on the other."

This metaphor encapsulates Macbeth's awareness of his moral overreach. His reliance on metaphor and dark diction—"Stars, hide your fires; Let not light see my black and deep desires"—reveals a man torn between conscience and aspiration. His decision to proceed with regicide, even while fully aware of the consequences, suggests a conscious surrender to ambition, making him largely accountable for the play's tragic trajectory. If he was less ambitious, he could choose not to be seduced by the witches' prophecies or by Lady Macbeth's provocations.

Furthermore, Macbeth's gradual alienation from his humanity is mirrored in his increasing reliance on euphemism and abstraction to describe violence—"the deed," "the business," "the affair"—rather than naming murder directly. This linguistic evasion reflects the moral corrosion that ambition inflicts upon him. As scholars like Greenblatt have noted, Macbeth's use of language becomes progressively fragmented and brutal, paralleling his psychological descent. His shift from "If it were done when 'tis done" to the cold assertion that "Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill" underscores his evolving complicity and internal justification of evil.

3 THE WITCHES AND SUPERNATURAL MANIPULATION

However, Macbeth should only be attributed part of the blame as we also have to consider supernatural forces, Duncan, and Lady Macbeth. By making it uncertain who to blame, Shakespeare may have been reflecting conditions in England when the Jacobean court had many ambitious courtiers competing for power and favour. Most notably was the threat of a Catholic conspiracy to overthrow James that was exposed in the Gunpowder Plot. Such conspiracies made it difficult to attribute blame to one person. The popular belief that dark supernatural forces were able to disrupt order in society, as James himself considered witchcraft as a serious threat to him, added a layer of complexity.

From the first scene of the play, supernatural powers target Macbeth's weakness. This is indicated when the weird sisters plan to be "on the heath" to "meet with Macbeth". Then in Act 1 Scene 3, they influence Macbeth and Banquo through their predictions "All hail Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!" To reflect their supernatural nature, Shakespeare uses haunting, trochaic rhythms associated with Black Magic spells or incantations that are distinct from the iambic pentameter that is commonly used in the rest of the play. An example is: "The weird sisters, hand in hand, Posters of the sea and land, Thus do go about, about". Additionally, the tone of their language is prophetic and ominous. Their indication that Macbeth should be "Thane of Cawdor" and "king hereafter" ignites his ambition for power so it can be argued that the witches are to be blamed for the outcome of the play by planting the seed in Macbeth's mind. Their culpability is further endorsed when they tell Banquo his "descendants will be king". Macbeth realizes that Banquo may threaten him in his path to kingship and the bond between the two warriors is broken. The intentionally

ambiguous oxymorons pronounced by the witches to Banquo that he is “lesser than Macbeth but also greater” as well as “not as happy as Macbeth yet much happier” adds to Macbeth’s internal conflict. From this moment on, Macbeth’s character is always split between his outside appearance and inner torment and this crucially influences the rest of the play. An example of this is when he says “If good, why do I yield to that suggestion” of “whose horrid image doth unfix my hair and make my seated heart knock at my ribs”. By igniting Macbeth’s ambition and internal conflict, they could be attributed the blame for the outcome of the play. It should be noted that in Holinshed’s *Chronicles* (an inspiration for the play) the witches were originally called the “goddesses of destine” but Shakespeare changed them to be less dramatically powerful and persuasive in the play in order to appeal to the audience and King James, who in his book *Daemonologie* showed his hatred of witches. It is also important to note that the witches are merely servants of a higher power represented later by Hecate so blame really lies with the anonymous invisible powers of darkness that work through the witches to disrupt order in a Christian kingdom. Their intention to bring disorder to the realm would have been understood by Shakespeare’s audience who believed in The Great Chain of Being and the Divine Right of Kings in an ordered world.

4 LADY MACBETH’S PROVOCATION AND GUILT

Lady Macbeth’s persistent insistence pushes Macbeth to kill Duncan and consequently means she could also be blamed for the outcome of the play. In the play, we see countless acts of persuasion like when she tells Macbeth to “screw your courage to the sticking-place.”

Shakespeare’s use of metaphor as Lady Macbeth compares courage to a firmly secured screw conveys that once Macbeth’s courage is firmly in place, it could become a driving force to help them achieve their ambition. Though Macbeth is seen as hesitant through his inner turmoil, this piece of advice may have persuaded him to make decisions that would largely influence the play. Additionally, by telling Macbeth “what’s done is done” after the first murder, we see Lady Macbeth devoid of guilt or troubled by her conscience. By convincing Macbeth to kill Duncan, which would then heavily influence the play, without remorse, she could be attributed the blame for the outcome of the play.

Her early resolve—“a little water clears us of this deed”—is steeped in irony, as water, traditionally symbolic of purification in Christian theology, is rendered meaningless in face of spiritual corruption. Her practical detachment contrasts with Macbeth’s philosophical brooding, suggesting that she initially possesses a stronger resolve.

By convincing Macbeth to kill Duncan, without remorse, she could be attributed the blame for the outcome of the play. However, her descent into madness later in the play reveals that guilt cannot be indefinitely repressed. In the sleepwalking scene (Act 5, Scene 1), her obsessive hand-washing—“Out, damned spot!”—and fragmented syntax underscore the psychological toll of suppressed guilt. Shakespeare uses prose instead of verse here, signaling her mental disintegration and social alienation.

However, her influence wanes as Macbeth grows more autonomous in his descent. This shift is evidenced in Act 3 onwards, where Macbeth no longer consults her before arranging Banquo and Fleance’s murder, indicating that the initial provocation has given way to independent tyranny. This narrative shift complicates the distribution of blame, as Lady Macbeth becomes a symbol of guilt and psychological collapse—ultimately losing agency in both her marriage and the plot. Her iconic sleepwalking scene reveals the subconscious moral reckoning that Macbeth resists. Thus, Lady Macbeth begins as a co-author of evil, but ends as its first casualty.

5 DUNCAN’S NAIVETY AND POLITICAL BLINDNESS

Duncan also plays a significant role in shaping the play through his naivety. In Act 1 Scene 4, Duncan states that “there’s no art to find the mind’s construction in the face” because Macdonwald, a traitor and the previous Thane of Cawdor “was a gentleman on whom” he “built an absolute trust”. Shakespeare’s use of imagery suggests that Duncan has put time and effort into the relationship. This reflects his poor judgement and foreshadows Macbeth’s eventual betrayal. When Duncan calls Macbeth “worthiest cousin” and adds “more is thy due than more than all can pay”, the audience would understand the deeply ironic significance of these words. Shakespeare’s use of dramatic irony heightens Duncan’s naivety because the audience knows what Macbeth is concealing. Duncan’s blind belief that Macbeth is a loyal and worthy kinsman leads to his death in Macbeth’s castle which then largely influences the rest of the play. Duncan’s failure is not merely personal but political. As a monarch, he symbolizes the stability of the realm. His inability to detect disloyalty exposes the vulnerability of a political system that relies heavily on personal bonds rather than institutional checks. By portraying Duncan as overly trusting and ceremonially generous—“Only I have left to say, more is thy due”—Shakespeare criticizes a court culture based on flattery and reward, not merit or prudence.

Moreover, Duncan’s tragic flaw could be linked to the Renaissance ideal of the ‘divine king’—a figure believed to rule by God’s grace and to possess innate discernment. His misjudgment thus serves as a dramatic warning: even divinely sanctioned kings are fallible, and political order is fragile.

Shakespeare may have portrayed Duncan in this light to warn James I of appointing individuals around him, as court politics during the Jacobean era were rife with patronage and betrayal. By making Duncan’s murder occur within the sanctuary of Macbeth’s own home, Shakespeare deepens the thematic violation—not just regicide, but a breach of hospitality, kinship, and sacred order.

Thus, Duncan's role in the tragedy is not simply that of a passive victim but that of a flawed king whose idealism enables the usurper's rise. In highlighting Duncan's political blindness, Shakespeare enriches the tragic fabric of the play and distributes responsibility across the hierarchy of power.

6 DISTRIBUTED RESPONSIBILITY AND JACOBAN CONTEXT

By making the attribution of blame ambiguous, Shakespeare mirrors the complex political realities of Jacobean England. The Gunpowder Plot of 1605, still fresh in public memory, exemplified how conspiracy and ambition could threaten the social order. Shakespeare's audience would have recognized the danger of undermining the "Divine Right of Kings" and the "Great Chain of Being." In this context, Macbeth's regicide is not only a personal crime but a cosmic rupture.

Furthermore, Shakespeare's use of ambiguity in blame reflects the epistemological uncertainty of the time. Who can truly judge intent and agency in an age of court intrigue, masked ambition, and divine rhetoric? As John Alvis (2020) suggests, Macbeth dramatizes not only a fall from grace but a systemic failure of political perception and moral clarity. Macbeth is not a lone villain but a product of a society already infected by duplicity, ambition, and occult fascination.

The witches, Lady Macbeth, Duncan, and Macbeth himself thus embody different aspects of a broader cultural and political ecosystem in crisis. The witches symbolize the external pressures of fate, temptation, and the subversion of natural law; Lady Macbeth represents internalized ambition and gendered power struggles; Duncan, a benevolent yet blind ruler, embodies the weaknesses of hereditary monarchy; and Macbeth, torn between personal aspiration and political reality, becomes the tragic medium through which all these tensions explode.

In this sense, blame in Macbeth is not linear but systemic. The tragedy unfolds not because of one villain's malice but due to the convergence of multiple fractured forces: moral frailty, political instability, esoteric belief, and metaphysical disorder. Shakespeare offers a grim portrait of what happens when ambition is uncoupled from virtue and when institutions fail to regulate private will.

This distribution of guilt anticipates modern political tragedies, where no single figure bears full culpability and collective failure generates catastrophe. Whether interpreted through a classical Aristotelian lens or modern structuralist critique, Macbeth resists simplification. It invites audiences to reflect on how individuals both shape and are shaped by the political, supernatural, and psychological contexts they inhabit.

7 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Macbeth's ambition obviously seems to the Shakespearean and contemporary audience alike as the catalyst for the events of the play which would then need to be restored by the same moral and spiritual rules of the Jacobean era that he goes against. Conversely, supernatural forces working through the witches, Duncan's naivety, and Lady Macbeth's continuous insistence should also partly be attributed the blame for the outcome of the play. Shakespeare's dramatization of moral failure and metaphysical disorder offers a rich commentary on power, responsibility, and human weakness. Ultimately, Macbeth serves not as a simple tale of villainy but as a tragic meditation on the complexity of blame.

The play's structure ensures that each act of violence generates ripples across private and public spheres, reminding audiences that personal ambition always carries political cost. In light of contemporary interpretations, Macbeth remains an enduring examination of how individual choices interface with historical forces, religious beliefs, and psychological instability. Shakespeare offers no final verdict—only a moral landscape in which guilt circulates, lingers, and ultimately consumes.

COMPETING INTERESTS

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WHO HAS MADE THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO THE EXPANSION OF HUMAN FREEDOM IN HISTORY?

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Abstract: Freedom is one of the core values of human society, which has been deeply reflected in different forms in different historical periods. The progress of human civilization is closely related to the development of freedom. Freedom includes not only political freedom, economic freedom and spiritual freedom, but also the harmonious coexistence and development of man and nature, man and man, and man and himself. The expansion of freedom is not only the result of social development, but also promotes the progress of civilization at all levels of human society. As Engels said: "All cultural progress is a step towards freedom." This paper will discuss several historical figures who have far-reaching influence on the expansion of human freedom, and analyze their contributions to promoting human freedom and how these contributions formed modern society.

Keywords: Human liberty; Cultural advancement; Influential individuals; Societal transformation; Multidimensional freedom

1 INTRODUCTION

Freedom is not an abstract concept, but the core goal of human pursuit of happiness and dignity. From ancient philosophers to modern political leaders, freedom is regarded as a symbol of the progress of human society, both in the ideological field and in practical actions[1]. Freedom is not only a state of avoiding external oppression, but also a multidimensional realization of individuality, social justice and ecological harmony. As a symbol of civilization and progress, freedom has been promoted by many thinkers, revolutionaries and social movements, and has become the common goal of mankind under the background of globalization. Freedom has different meanings in different social and historical periods, but no matter how its form changes, its core is to protect personal dignity and development opportunities, and promote social justice and harmony on this basis.

2 FREEDOM AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: A BALANCED APPROACH

The realization of freedom does not mean that individuals can do whatever they want. True freedom must be balanced within the framework of social responsibility and justice. In the process of expanding freedom, everyone should be responsible not only for his own interests and rights, but also for others, society and future generations. For example, in the practice of economic freedom, individuals and enterprises should pay attention to social interests rather than pure economic interests, and avoid realizing short-term personal interests through environmental pollution and waste of resources. The realization of freedom must be closely combined with social sustainable development, ecological protection and fairness and justice. Only under this balance can freedom not be extreme or selfish. Many great thinkers and leaders in human history have made important contributions to the expansion of freedom[2,3].

3 SOCRATES AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF FREEDOM

Socrates is an ancient Greek philosopher and is known as one of the founders of western philosophy. His thoughts not only had a far-reaching impact on the development of western philosophy, but also provided a solid theoretical basis for later generations' freedom and moral concepts[4,5]. Socrates' view of freedom of thought is of special historical significance. He emphasized "knowing yourself" and advocated realizing personal ideological independence and moral autonomy through rational reflection. This thought not only had a far-reaching influence in ancient Greek society at that time, but also provided valuable enlightenment for the combination of individual freedom and social justice in the later civilization process.

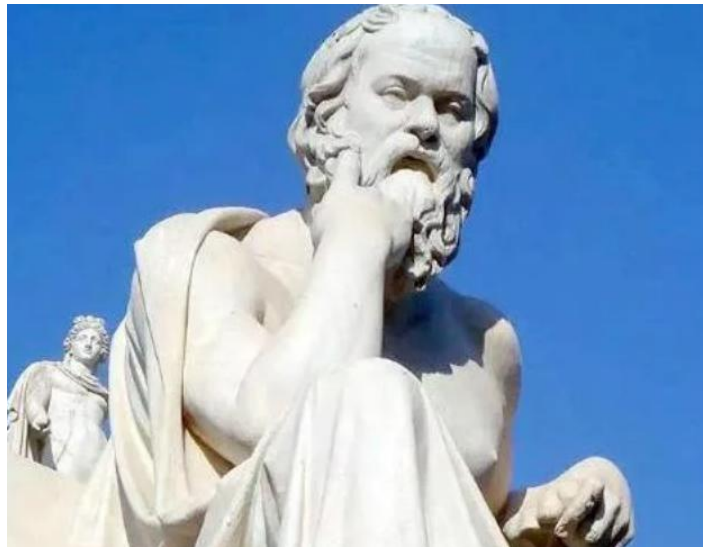


Figure 1 Sculpture of Socrates

3.1 The Socratic Method: Freedom Through Self-Examination

The concept of freedom plays an important role in Socrates' philosophical system. Freedom is not a blind resistance to the outside world, but a personal choice based on reason and moral judgment. Socrates encouraged students to reflect on themselves through interactive teaching method, and tried to help students get rid of seemingly blind follow-up and realize freedom of thought. He advocates that human beings should get rid of ignorance and prejudice and seek truth, and the process of seeking this truth itself is the embodiment of freedom[6].

The core concept of Socrates' view of freedom is "knowing yourself". This is not only a philosophical proposition, but also an attitude towards life. Socrates tried to encourage students to realize their ignorance and pursue the truth through self-exploration through his own question-and-answer dialogue method. In this process, freedom is not only a rebellion against the outside world, but also a profound reflection on self, which requires individuals to achieve a certain degree of moral and rational consciousness[7].

Through Socrates' "know yourself", people began to understand that freedom is not disorderly indulgence, but independent choice under rational and moral constraints. This thought provided a theoretical basis for the later western liberalism theory and influenced Plato, Aristotle and other philosophical concepts.

4 THE LIMITS OF FREEDOM: CLASSICAL VIRTUE VS. MODERN SUSTAINABILITY

Freedom is an important part of human civilization, which runs through the whole historical process. The thought of freedom in modern society is different from that in ancient times, but the core idea has continued in many ways. Socrates' pursuit of freedom was based on personal reflection and moral judgment, which had a far-reaching impact on later liberalism. Freedom is not unlimited indulgence, but requires individuals to make choices under the guidance of reason and morality. Under the influence of Socrates, later philosophers and politicians gradually realized that freedom is closely related to social responsibility, legal order, ecological sustainability and other issues, not only pursuing individual freedom, but also ignoring the common interests of society.

With the development of history, the concept of freedom is constantly evolving. In modern society, freedom includes not only ideological freedom, but also political freedom, economic freedom and social freedom. For example, both the American War of Independence and the French Revolution were based on individual rights and the pursuit of democratic politics. Behind these revolutions and movements is an extension of Socrates' thought of "knowing yourself". Individuals should not blindly obey external authority, but make their own choices according to rational and moral judgments.

But freedom is not unlimited, and a balance must be found between social and ecological sustainability. For example, economic freedom is an important part of modern society, but it cannot be at the expense of environmental damage. With the development of globalization, global environmental problems and resource depletion are becoming more and more serious. How to ensure the sustainability of the ecological environment while pursuing economic freedom has become an important challenge for modern society. The emergence of this problem reminds us that the realization of freedom must consider the carrying capacity of the ecosystem and the fairness of society.

5 FREEDOM ACROSS AGES: FROM PHILOSOPHICAL AUTONOMY TO DIGITAL RESPONSIBILITY

The concept of classical freedom is completely different from the concept of freedom today. Classical freedom is related to human morality and is regarded as the expression of virtue. In Socrates, freedom acts according to morality, morality is knowledge, and knowledge is the result of rational behavior, so freedom is bound by reason and morality. In Plato, virtue means goodness, goodness means ideas, and ideas are not influenced by anything in the world. That is the origin

of the world, and the world is just an advanced and lame counselor. Therefore, freedom is related to goodness as an idea. In Aristotle, freedom is related to the city-state, which is the goodness in the city-state law, an ideal and a virtue. After the Middle Ages, freedom was associated with God's salvation, which was considered as the state after salvation. We have no freedom in the world bound by sin. Only the freedom to do evil, not the freedom to do good. Therefore, individuals must be in the church and within the laws of God's belief in order to have some freedom. He must abide by the laws of God's faith, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and constantly repent, and embark on the road of salvation. Both the freedom of ancient Greece and the freedom of Christianity denied the biological characteristics of human beings, and regulated the logic of human behavior through human moral rationality. Plato's creation of human beings comes from the world of ideas. Because people get drunk, lose their minds and fall into our world. People created by Christian God are created in their own image, not from dust. This kind of creation elevates human noumenon to the world.

Therefore, people's autonomy is emphasized in the concept of classical freedom. Not from the world, he has biological nature, but he has to go beyond biological nature, so people can't act according to biological nature, but should act according to moral nature and rationality.

Therefore, in order to transcend human virtue and biological nature, individual people are more easily controlled by biological nature, so people must belong to a certain group. Therefore, Jesus said, that sheep is very dangerous, so we must abandon 99 sheep and find the one who is alone. This is not only because this sheep can't protect itself from other creatures, but also because this lonely person is more degenerate and easier to forget his moral nature.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The real realization of freedom is not only the liberation of individuals, but also the embodiment of social responsibility. In modern society, especially in the background of informationization and globalization, the realization of freedom is facing more and more challenges. With the rapid development of information technology, personal privacy, data security and network freedom have become new problems. While enjoying the freedom of information, how to protect personal privacy from infringement and how to avoid information abuse and algorithm discrimination has become an important issue to be solved urgently. Socrates' view of freedom can provide us with a framework for thinking-freedom should not only serve the interests of individuals, but also serve the well-being of the whole society.

Freedom and responsibility coexist, and they are inseparable. In the theory of social contract, members of society voluntarily give up part of their personal freedom by reaching a consensus in exchange for social stability and common interests. Freedom is not blind selfishness, but respect for others' freedom and commitment to social responsibility within the framework of rationality and morality. In this context, Socrates' thought provides us with wisdom on how to find a balance between freedom and responsibility[8].

The expansion of freedom is not only the liberation of individuals, but also the embodiment of social fairness. True freedom should be that each individual realizes his own value under the conditions of equality and justice. For example, in education, medical care, employment and other fields, equal opportunities for all are the foundation of freedom. Solving the inequality problems such as poverty, gender and race is an important prerequisite for realizing freedom. Freedom is not isolated, it is closely related to the freedom of others. If some groups cannot enjoy freedom because of social inequality, then this freedom is not real freedom.

From Socrates' philosophy, we can deeply understand that the realization of individual freedom depends not only on individual efforts, but also on social structure, resource allocation and cultural background. The expansion of freedom needs to be accompanied by the promotion of social equity. Only in a fair society can everyone realize his self-worth and enjoy real freedom under equal conditions.

As a great philosopher in ancient Greece, Socrates' concept of freedom has a far-reaching influence on later generations[9]. He not only advocates the freedom of personal thought, but also advocates the independent choice of reason and morality. In Socrates' thought, freedom and responsibility, social justice, ecological sustainability and other issues are closely related, and they complement each other. With the development of society, the connotation of freedom is constantly enriched, from political freedom to economic freedom, and then to social freedom, each form of freedom is closely related to the background of the times and social needs. The realization of freedom is not only the liberation of individuals, but also the common goal of the whole society and all mankind. In the future, we should continue to strive to find a balance between freedom and responsibility, freedom and social justice, so that freedom can be truly realized under the background of globalization and informationization.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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THE POLITICAL POWER STRUCTURES IN EAST ASIA: DECENTRALIZATION AND CENTRALIZATION — A CASE STUDY OF ANCIENT JAPAN AND CHINA

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Abstract: This study compares the historical development of centralized imperial power in China and decentralized governance in Japan, focusing on the Kamakura Shogunate's shukurō system. It examines how geographical, ideological, and cultural factors—such as China's unified Confucian-Legalist traditions and vast arable terrain versus Japan's clan-based structure and mountainous geography—shaped distinct political systems. China's centralized model enabled efficient decision-making and stability but risked autocracy, while Japan's polycentric approach fostered adaptability yet incurred fragmentation. The analysis highlights trade-offs between efficiency and flexibility, offering insights into balancing centralization and decentralization in modern governance.

Keywords: Centralized governance; Decentralized systems; East Asian political civilization; Historical comparative analysis

1 INTRODUCTION

In the course of history, East Asia developed diverse and distinctive political civilizations. As two representative countries, China and Japan exhibited markedly different power structures. Since the unification of the Qin Dynasty, China gradually established a centralized system of imperial power with the emperor at its core, where authority was highly concentrated and exclusive. By contrast, in ancient and medieval Japan, the political structure was relatively decentralized. For instance, during the Kamakura Shogunate, the system of collective decision-making by senior councilors (shukurō) embodied a polycentric and consultative form of power. These differences are not merely variations in institutional forms but also reflect deeper influences stemming from divergent historical trajectories, geographical environments, and cultural conceptions[1-5].

2 CAUSES OF DIVERGENT DEVELOPMENT

2.1 China: The Ideology of Unification and the Role of Geography in Fostering Centralized Imperial Power

2.1.1 Ideological and cultural factors

Ancient China was deeply influenced by Confucian thought, in which the ideology of “Great Unification” permeated the political and cultural tradition. Confucianism emphasized social order and hierarchical harmony, asserting that a sage ruler should govern the realm to maintain stability and ensure the continuity of morality. For example, Dong Zhongshu's doctrine of “Great Unification of the Spring and Autumn Annals” provided a theoretical foundation for centralized imperial power, legitimizing the emperor as the divinely ordained supreme ruler with absolute authority. Meanwhile, Legalist thought, particularly during the Qin Dynasty, reinforced the construction of a centralized system. Advocating autocracy and centralization, Legalism emphasized strict laws and strong state power to control both the populace and the bureaucracy. On this basis, the Qin Dynasty established a highly organized administrative system. Although later dynasties made adjustments to specific institutions, the core principle of centralization remained a consistent feature throughout imperial China.

2.1.2 Geographical factors

China's vast territory, relatively flat terrain, and close internal connectivity facilitated the formation of large-scale agricultural settlements. Effective management of agriculture, massive hydraulic projects, and defense against invasions all required strong central authority. For example, controlling the flooding of the Yellow River and other major rivers necessitated mobilization of enormous resources—something only a centralized monarchy could achieve. Thus, the need to integrate and manage nationwide resources continuously reinforced centralized imperial power.

2.2 Japan: Clan Tradition, Geographic Conditions, and External Influences Leading to Decentralization

2.2.1 Domestic political and cultural factors

In ancient Japan, society was structured around clans (*uji*), each controlling its own territory, military force, and economic interests, and enjoying significant autonomy. Although the Taika Reform attempted to imitate China's centralized bureaucracy, the entrenched power of clans limited the emperor's authority. Aristocrats, temples, and shrines retained substantial political influence, resulting in a multi-centered system. Japanese culture emphasized harmony and

consensus, favoring decision-making through consultation rather than unilateral rule. This cultural tradition provided fertile ground for the existence of decentralized power structures such as the *shukurō deliberative system*, enabling different political forces to participate in state governance within a certain framework. Beginning with the Muromachi Shogunate, the promulgation of the *Hanzei* decree allowed local samurai to gradually break away from the manorial economy that had originally been dominated by aristocratic politics. They began to consolidate as *kokujin-shū* (provincial samurai groups) and assumed de facto control over grassroots administrative units. The lack of effective power distribution at the local level facilitated a steady downward shift of authority. This process ultimately intensified with the outbreak of the Ōnin War, which deepened local conflicts and pushed the trend of downward power transfer to its peak, culminating in the unique phenomenon of *gekokujo* (“the low overthrowing the high”) in Japan’s political transformation.

2.2.2 Geography and external influences

Japan’s mountainous and fragmented terrain fostered regional power bases, making excessive centralization difficult. As an island nation, Japan also faced constant external influences through maritime trade, cultural exchange, and political contact with China and Korea. Such pressures required a flexible political structure. Decentralized governance allowed Japan to better adapt to these changing external conditions.

3 STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES

3.1 Characteristics of China’s Centralized Imperial System

3.1.1 A single, supreme power core

The emperor held ultimate authority over politics, economy, military, and culture. From central to local levels, officials were appointed and controlled directly or indirectly by the emperor. All major decisions required imperial approval, ensuring that authority penetrated every level of governance.

3.1.2 A centralized bureaucratic system

At the central level, institutions such as the *Three Departments and Six Ministries* maintained division of labor and checks and balances while serving imperial rule. Over time, prime ministerial authority was weakened under the emperor’s supremacy—for instance, the Ming dynasty abolished the office of the chancellor, further strengthening direct imperial control.

At the local level, the *commandery-county system* ensured that officials were appointed by and reported to the central government, handling administration, taxation, and justice under central supervision. This system secured effective control over local affairs and maintained national unity.

3.2 Characteristics of Japan’s Council System of the Kamakura Shogunate

3.2.1 Coexistence of multiple power centers

During the Kamakura shogunate, power was distributed among the emperor, the shogun, and senior councilors (*shukuro*). The emperor, though symbolically supreme, wielded little real authority, which was largely cultural and religious. The shogun held practical political and military power but was subject to the councilors’ oversight. Senior councilors, as veteran statesmen with strong clan bases, played decisive roles in policymaking, with major issues requiring collective deliberation.

3.2.3 Checks and balances through division of power

The shogunate created offices such as the *shikken* (regent), *samurai-dokoro* (military board), and *monchūjo* (judicial board), distributing administrative, military, and judicial powers to different officials. These institutions both cooperated and supervised one another, preventing excessive power concentration.

At the local level, the manorial system gave landowners considerable autonomy in administration, justice, and economy. While the shogunate exercised some control—such as appointments, taxation, and security enforcement—it never achieved the absolute dominance over local power that China did. Thus, decentralized forces remained strong in Japan’s political structure.

4 STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES ANALYSIS

4.1 Decision-Making Efficiency and Executive Capacity

4.1.1 Strengths and weaknesses of China’s centralized imperial system

Under China’s centralized imperial system, the decision-making process was relatively straightforward and efficient. The emperor could swiftly issue commands, mobilizing national manpower, material, and financial resources to respond to emergencies and major affairs. For example, in times of natural disasters or frontier conflicts, the emperor was able to immediately allocate resources and organize relief or military campaigns, thereby ensuring national stability and security. Moreover, a unified bureaucratic system and administrative directives ensured effective policy implementation, reduced local resistance and bureaucratic shirking, and facilitated the smooth enforcement of policies at the grassroots level, contributing to social-economic development and national unity.

However, such a highly centralized power structure also had evident drawbacks. Local officials often became overly reliant on central directives, lacking flexibility to adapt policies to local conditions. This not only weakened policy

effectiveness but also dampened local development vitality. Furthermore, the excessive concentration of power created fertile ground for corruption and instability. Ministers, eunuchs, or close courtiers around the emperor could exploit imperial authority for personal gain, forming corrupt cliques that misled the throne and induced poor decisions, sometimes shaking the very foundations of state governance.

4.1.2 Characteristics of Japan's *shukurō* deliberative system

Japan's *shukurō* deliberative system involved a more complex and lengthy decision-making process that required negotiation and consensus among multiple factions. While this often led to disagreements and delays, it also carried unique advantages. It allowed for the pooling of diverse wisdom and accommodated the interests of different groups, making decisions more inclusive and viable. In terms of execution, local lords, possessing a degree of autonomy, were more proactive in implementing policies that aligned with their own interests. Conversely, they might resist or neglect policies that conflicted with their local priorities, resulting in uneven implementation. From another perspective, however, this autonomy enabled local authorities to flexibly adapt policies to regional realities, better addressing local needs and avoiding rigid "one-size-fits-all" enforcement. In this sense, the system enhanced local adaptability and flexibility.

4.2 Political Stability and Social Order

4.2.1 Stability of China's centralized imperial system

Within China's centralized imperial framework, the emperor held absolute authority, enabling effective coordination of interests and maintaining political stability and social order. For most of China's history, relatively long periods of unity and stable development were sustained. Centralized governance allowed the state to repel invasions, suppress rebellions, and resolve social conflicts and crises, thereby creating favorable conditions for economic prosperity and cultural continuity. For example, during the powerful Han and Tang dynasties, strong imperial authority and centralized institutions ensured national unification, territorial expansion, and cultural flourishing.

Nevertheless, this stability was not indestructible. The high concentration of power made the emperor's personal competence pivotal to the fate of the state. If the emperor was immature, ignorant, or indulgent, state affairs could fall under the control of corrupt officials or powerful relatives, resulting in corruption and turmoil. For instance, during the Tianqi reign of the Ming Dynasty, Emperor Zhu Youjiao indulged in carpentry, while political authority was usurped by the eunuch Wei Zhongxian and his clique, notorious as the "Eunuch Party." Their abuse of power, persecution of dissenters, and rampant exploitation of the populace exacerbated social tensions, leading to large-scale peasant uprisings that hastened the dynasty's collapse. This illustrates that while centralized imperial rule could achieve strength and stability under a capable ruler, it was equally susceptible to crisis under weak or manipulated leadership.

4.1.3 Stability of Japan's *shukurō* deliberative system

Japan's decentralized power structure often led to frequent political struggles and internal conflicts. Rival power centers regularly clashed in pursuit of authority and interests. Factional rivalries within the shogunate and confrontations between local lords and central authority contributed to frequent regime changes and relative social instability in Japanese history. During the Sengoku period, Japan was engulfed in prolonged fragmentation and warfare, as competing *daimyō* fought for territory and supremacy for over a century, inflicting severe devastation on the economy and populace.

On the other hand, this decentralized structure provided Japanese society with greater resilience and adaptability. Local powers were able to independently handle regional affairs and respond to external changes, fostering diversified economic and cultural development. Furthermore, the *shukurō* deliberative system emphasized negotiation and consensus among factions, which helped balance interests and prevented any single force from dominating the state. This consultative decision-making model, to some degree, mitigated the risks of despotism and policy errors inherent in overly centralized systems.

5 LESSONS AND INSIGHTS

5.1 Balancing Centralization and Decentralization

The comparison between ancient China and Japan demonstrates that centralization and decentralization are not inherently superior or inferior. The key lies in finding a balance that aligns with national conditions and societal needs. Excessive centralization risks authoritarianism, abuse of power, and suppression of social dynamism, while excessive decentralization may lead to fragmentation, inefficiency, and disorder. In modern governance, states should, under the principles of democracy and rule of law, reasonably allocate power between central and local governments as well as between state institutions and civil society. Central governments should retain authority in macroeconomic regulation, strategic planning, and resource distribution, while granting sufficient autonomy and flexibility to local governments and social organizations to stimulate creativity and meet diverse regional and social needs.

5.2 Geopolitical Factors and Institutional Adaptability

Geopolitical environments profoundly shape the formation and development of political institutions. Countries in different geographic contexts must construct power structures suited to their circumstances. China, with its vast territory and unevenly distributed resources, required strong central authority to integrate and allocate resources, promote

regional balance, and preserve unity and stability. By contrast, Japan, as an island nation with fragmented and complex geography, emphasized institutional flexibility and adaptability to cope with external uncertainties and the diversity of local powers. Hence, in designing political systems, countries should fully consider their geographical characteristics and cultural traditions. Instead of mechanically imitating foreign models, they must explore developmental paths consistent with their own national contexts.

6 CONCLUSION

The centralized imperial system of ancient China and the decentralized *shukurō* deliberative system of ancient Japan developed under the combined influence of distinct historical, geographical, and cultural conditions. By comparing their causes, structural differences, and impacts, we gain deeper insights into two representative political models of East Asian civilization. More importantly, such comparative analysis offers valuable lessons for the modernization of governance today—specifically, how to achieve rational power distribution, establish effective political order, and promote harmonious and stable social development[6-8].

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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TRAUMA AND RECOVERY: A LITERARY PRAGMATIC READING OF CHINESE AMERICAN WOMEN *IN THE KITCHEN GOD'S WIFE*

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Abstract: This paper conducts a literary pragmatic study on the linguistic representation of Chinese American women's trauma and its recovery on the basis of specific textual analysis, with the novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* by Chinese American writer Amy Tan as a case. As a result, it is found that the linguistic representation of trauma as well as the recovery vary in terms of lexicon, grammar and speech acts. Specifically, the symptoms of the heroine's trauma are composed through the use of hedges, mixed narrative tenses, and directive speech acts; the causes of her trauma are highlighted via the use of imperative if-conditional sentences and directive speech acts by the people around her; her efforts to gradually recover from the trauma are framed in her increasing use of positive adjectives, narrative tenses with explicit adverbials of time, and assertive speech acts. All these findings not only shed new light on interpreting women's trauma from a pragmatic perspective, but also enrich the veins of Chinese American literature and trauma literature analysis.

Keywords: Chinese American literature; Women's trauma; Recovery; Linguistic representation

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the release and popularity of the film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* put the spotlight on the survival of Chinese women in the United States. Over the past three years, the COVID-19 epidemic has caused catastrophic damage to almost every aspect of life of ethnic minorities in the United States, especially ethnic women who suffer both racial and sexist persecution. Among them are Chinese American women long-tied by traditional Chinese patriarchy and mainstream American culture. Accordingly, the film is a magical and fantastical glimpse into the process of the heroine's struggles for liberation and interdependence. The mythically expected image of a great and devoted mother projected by the heroine is in reality a microcosm for thousands of ordinary traumatised Chinese women.

Like other literary works of marginalised minorities, the literature on Chinese American women has a duty to portray the ongoing psychological and physical trauma suffered by the disadvantaged group in the white-dominated society. The Chinese American autobiographical novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* by Amy Tan is chosen as the object for a textual analysis that explores the heroine's traumatic memories and her recovery from trauma. Both the images of the heroines in this novel and in the film mentioned earlier are no longer just a cultural symbol, but represent efforts to reconstruct the female myth to create a more contemporary image of Chinese women and ultimately to inspire and guide Chinese women's recovery of trauma in real life today.

Currently, research on Chinese American literature at home and abroad mostly examines the plight of ethnic minorities in the United States from the perspectives of ethnicity, feminism, and post-colonialism. As for the trauma of Chinese American women, domestic scholars tend to pay more attention to the authors' contribution, Bildungsroman, multiculturalism, themes and narrative tactics to promote the export of Chinese culture. Unlike China, foreign scholars link their research to mainstream American ideology and literary criticism. However, the trauma of women in Chinese American literature is hardly analysed from the perspective of pragmatics in both domestic and foreign research. Based on the above studies, this paper pragmatically examines the representation of women's trauma and recovery in *The Kitchen God's Wife* at the three levels of linguistic forms including lexicon, syntax and speech acts. The aim is to suggest more subtle and profound ways in which traumatic experiences can be better understood and healed, and to enrich the research perspective of Chinese American female literature and trauma literature analysis.

This paper totally consists of five parts. Chapter 1 introduces the background information and the research significance of this paper. Chapter 2 reviews the previous studies of *The Kitchen God's Wife* at home and abroad. Chapter 3 presents research questions and data collection and analysis of the paper. Chapter 4, as the main part of the paper, makes a discussion of the linguistic representation of women's trauma and the recovery of trauma in *The Kitchen God's Wife* at three levels of lexicon, grammar and speech acts. Chapter 5 summarizes the major findings, research limitations and suggestions for future research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Two years after her success with the first book, Amy Tan presented *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Since its publication in 1991, it has been hailed as Tan's second achievement and sparked passionate discussion both domestically and internationally.

2.1 Previous Studies of *The Kitchen God's Wife* Abroad

Academic critics from abroad have studied this book with in-depth findings from various vantages such as mother-daughter relationships, multiculturalism, sexism and narratology. Among them, the mother-daughter relationship receives the most attention. For example, some emphasize that only by recognizing and accepting the importance of their mother-daughter relationships can the female characters in *The Kitchen God's Wife* come to terms with the paradoxes and internal conflicts of women in white male society. However, research is not limited to this family relationship. Increasingly, scholars interpret this stalemated mother-daughter relationship combined with the era backgrounds. On the one hand, some scholars in the context of the increasing turnover and cultural exchange on a global scale, focus on multicultural identity. Some discuss the characteristics of "Otherness", proposing four specific peculiarities, and approaches the theme of otherness between two cultures. On the other hand, scholars combined with a deep-rooted patriarchal culture, emphasize the sexism theme in this novel. Meanwhile, they analyze the gender bias and the oppression the female characters suffered in *The Kitchen God's Wife*. In addition to these studies based on the content of the novel, the subject of narrative tactics is also a common concern. Some investigate a unique strategy of narrative therapy that is used in sharing traumatic reminiscences in diasporic contexts.

2.2 Previous Studies of *The Kitchen God's Wife* in China

With the same interest in the topic of mother-daughter relationships and identities, domestic researches so far somewhat overlap with their international counterparts. Many domestic scholars focus more on the heroine's awakening and struggle than on her traumatic experiences. Some point out that sisterhood plays a critical role in Winnie's struggle against patriarchy and pursuit of freedom and equality. Meanwhile, others give an innovative interpretation of the female characters' will and efforts against their fate in *The Kitchen God's Wife* from the perspective of existentialism. However, this kind of research has not made a dynamic analysis from both macro and micro contexts. Given Amy Tan's bicultural background, several researchers discuss the main character's conflicts from the perspective of cross-culture. This kind of research aims to explore more effective transmission of Chinese culture in cross-cultural communication. For instance, some intend to illuminate cross-cultural context and mechanism of misreading of Chinese image in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, which reflects the narrative and survival strategies of Chinese American writers in response to the mainstream culture. Furthermore, different from the research around the heroine, others creatively give a sociological study of the loss of functions of Winnie's first husband, Wen Fu, in *The Kitchen God's Wife*, which is a significant expansion of the methods of literary criticism and the scope of interpretation of texts.

In conclusion, the foreign and domestic studies on *The Kitchen God's Wife* have developed a varied and versatile research mode. Nevertheless, they lack a pragmatic exploration of the recovery of trauma of Chinese American women in *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Along this vein, this paper contributes to enriching the research on Chinese American literature by undertaking a detailed analysis of the characters' discourse from the perspective of Literary Pragmatics.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research Questions

Based on trauma theory, the study of literary pragmatics is conducted into the linguistic representation of Chinese American women's trauma and the recovery of trauma in *The Kitchen God's Wife* and mainly focuses on the following two research questions:

First, what are the linguistic representations of Chinese American women's trauma in *The Kitchen God's Wife*?

Second, what are the linguistic representations of the recovery of Chinese American women's trauma in *The Kitchen God's Wife*?

This paper attempts to answer these two questions by providing a detailed pragmatic analysis of the characters' discourse in *The Kitchen God's Wife* at lexical, grammatical and pragmatic levels.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

This paper takes the Chinese American novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* as a case. The novel mainly involves one pair of Chinese mother's and American-born daughter's stories. Notably, Amy Tan provides the mother with nearly two-thirds of the whole novel's length to tell her own story in old China and the United States in the first-person voice. Such an arrangement aims to expose the double marginalisation of Chinese American women by both traditional patriarchy and colonial hegemony, and their struggle against such hardships. In addition, there is a parallel mother-daughter narrative, in which the narrative of Winnie not only aids in her own self-restoration, but also assists Pearl in recovering from her trauma.

During data collection, based on a close reading of *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the related discourse of the main characters was selected and divided into two aspects and then further categorised into three levels of linguistic forms. The study adopts a qualitative and inductive approach and the research design is hermeneutic and interpretive. Using textual analysis as the research method, the trauma and trauma recovery of Winnie and Pearl in *The Kitchen God's Wife* is understood and examined and then described and explained in the context of the theory.

4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

By exploring linguistic forms of representation of female characters' trauma and its recovery in *The Kitchen God's Wife* at lexical, grammatical and pragmatic levels, this chapter explores Winnie and Pearl's traumatic symptoms, causes, and efforts to recover from trauma.

4.1 Linguistic Representation of Women's Trauma in *The Kitchen God's Wife*

4.1.1 Lexical representation of trauma

At the lexical level, the symptoms of the women's trauma in *The Kitchen God's Wife* manifest themselves mainly through the use of hedges. Lakoff defines hedges as words or phrases that make something more obscure [1]. Therefore, women tend to use hedges to avoid conflict and tone down hostility in order to maintain current harmonious interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, due to social factors and personal trauma, women unconsciously use hedges to hide their insecurity and powerlessness, which serves as a form of self-defence and self-protection. For example,

Ex 1:

Winnie: "She's become very weak from so much diarrhea, I'm afraid. [2]"

In this example, Winnie avoids absolute statements by using a hedge, which stands for possibility and uncertainty. Influenced by social customs, traditional culture and psychological factors, women tend to adopt hedges more often than men to indicate hesitation. Besides, hedges can leave the speaker with a choice of whether to assume responsibility [3]. Therefore, suffering from sexual violence, Winnie is completely helpless so she uses the hedge to avoid conflicts with Wen Fu while accepting the probability of being beaten and scolded.

Pearl's trauma is also reflected in her use of hedges. For example,

Ex 2:

Pearl: "Ma, you know that slight problem with my leg I told you about. Well, thank God, it turned out not to be cancer, but--" [2].

In this example, the use of the hedge "you know" and the parenthesis euphemistically indicates Pearl's resistance to Winnie's excessive concern and her attempt to maintain a seemingly harmonious mother-daughter relationship. In a situation of horror, people spontaneously look for the first source of comfort. However, the secrets about the trauma that Winnie has kept to herself for decades lead to an unspeakable rift between her and Pearl, who has hidden the secret of her malignant brain tumor. Ignorance of Winnie's traumatic past and confusion about her overprotectiveness drives Pearl to resist her mother's manipulation of her life, ending up with intergenerational trauma.

4.1.2 Grammatical representation of trauma

Grammatically, imperative if-conditional sentences and dual narrative tenses are utilized for traumatic representation in *The Kitchen God's Wife*. Grammar and pragmatics are interactive and complementary in their interdependence. Therefore, linguistic sense cannot be separated from the participants and the context, nor can it be vacuumed from the vehicle of grammar, i.e. the structure of language [4].

(1) Imperative If-conditional Sentences

In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, the imperative if-conditional sentences present an unequal relationship of dominance and subordination between the participants [4]. Under the double burden of semi-colonial and semi-feudal systems, especially when haughty men are eclipsed by imperialism, their perverted male superiority and dignity can only find their way into the slavery of women. Therefore, Wen Fu occupies a dominant position with the power and status to issue orders, while Winnie is always a passive recipient in a subordinate position.

In the following case, the imperative if-conditional construction expresses two pragmatic meanings: a threatening illocutionary meaning and a seductive illocutionary meaning [4]. When Wen Fu uses this structure to intimidate Winnie, he mainly applies a discourse form that combines a negative if-conditional clause and a declarative sentence. When this sentence pattern is used for hoaxes, it consists of an affirmative if-conditional clause and a declarative sentence. For example,

Ex 3:

Wen Fu: "Of course I will kill you and everyone else in this house if you do not obey."

Wen Fu: "If she says she is sorry, I will forgive everything, and she can come home with me." [2]

In this example, Wen Fu uses several imperative if-conditional sentences to dissuade Winnie from divorcing him, and also makes a false promise to get her to give in. Rowbotham notes that language conveys a certain power, which is one of the instruments of domination [5]. Therefore, resistance and compromise are intertwined in Winnie's state of mind. Beauvoir states that "humanity is male and men define women not in herself but as relative to him; woman is not regarded as an autonomous being" [6]. Consequently, Wen Fu repeatedly demonstrates his total conquest over Winnie, who is repeatedly forced to surrender.

(2) Dual Narrative Tenses

The representation of trauma in Chinese American literature is often an interplay of two tenses, with the present tense containing the pain of the past while the past tense expressing the ongoing resentment [7]. In *The Kitchen God's Wife*, when Winnie tells her daughter about her past, she cannot clearly distinguish between past and present with a blurred and uncontrolled perception of time, reflecting the ongoing and profound effects of her trauma. Pierre Janet explains this by saying that "the traumatic event triggers an overwhelming emotional response and consequently an altered state of consciousness" [8]. For example,

Ex 4:

Winnie: "A little child can say, 'My body is my body.' I was a grown woman, and I could not say this. [2]"

In this example, in describing this experience of perpetual psychological trauma, Winnie uses the general present tense to reproach herself and the general past tense to show her powerlessness in the face of oppression. Just as Laub says, the traumatic event "has no beginning, no end, no before, no during and no after" [9]. Victims may enter a numbing state of surrender at the time of a traumatic event; however, long after that, traumatised people relive the event in their thoughts, dreams and actions as if it were constantly repeating itself in the present [8]. Such representation of linguistic forms reflects Winnie's deep trauma of marital and sexual violence and reflects the delayed traumatic reactions.

4.1.3 Pragmatic representation of trauma

At the pragmatic level, traumatic representation is much depicted in the characters' directive speech acts in *The Kitchen God's Wife*. A direct speech act is one in which the speaker gives the listener some kind of command, instruction or order. Directive speech acts in *The Kitchen God's Wife* are used to reproduce real traumatic scenes and to further explain the causes of trauma, as shown in the following examples:

Ex 5:

Wen Fu: "Kneel down. Bow your head and beg me to forgive you. Kneel down!" [2]

Example 5 is only part of the many directive speeches with strong imperatives that Wen Fu uses when he beats and rapes Winnie. Wen Fu uses his language as an act of domination and the perlocutionary equivalent is often physical violence. Marital and sexual violence in particular is a serious blow to the dignity of the individual [8]. Especially when the rapist is a husband, the victim is the most vulnerable of all. Moreover, discourse is inevitably or necessarily domination, a form of "power over" others [10], so Wen Fu's illocutionary purpose is to force Winnie to obey him absolutely. It also shows that Wen Fu holds an absolutely high and authoritative position in the marital relationship.

Ex 6:

Winnie: "You go see Wen Fu! You go to hell down below!" [2].

In this case, when Winnie sees the image of the Kitchen God, she adopts a directive, swearing speech act. Traumatized people are more likely to perceive environmental stimuli that remind them of the traumatic event [11]. Therefore, Winnie is easily emotionally disturbed and is so frightened that she thinks Wen Fu is still torturing her like a demon. It is one of the symptoms of trauma called hyperarousal, implying a recurrent anticipation of danger [8]. So, her illocutionary purpose is to curse Wen Fu and try to eradicate his influence from her life, which is "an experience lived belatedly at the level of its unspeakable truth" [12].

Ex 7:

Winnie: "Pearl-ah, have to go, no choice."

Pearl: "Ma, we're fine. Don't worry. Go to bed. [2]"

In this example, Winnie uses forcefully commanding directives with the illocutionary aim of forcing Pearl to obediently follow her orders. Therefore, the conversations between mother and daughter are always bumpy and spotty like arguments. Although Pearl's directive speech act in the example sounds gentle, persuading Winnie to take a rest, she nevertheless expresses enduring impatience at her mother's excessively penetrating worry. Consequently, their mutual misunderstandings lead to trauma that crippled the two when they intend to construct a trustworthy mother-daughter relationship [8].

4.2 Linguistic Representation of the Recovery of Women's Trauma in *The Kitchen God's Wife*

4.2.1 Lexical representation of recovery

At the lexical level, Winnie uses more adjectives, especially those with positive senses, to disclose her inner world during the recovery process. Such adjectives can intuitively reflect the mood and attitude of the characters at that moment. On the way to overcoming trauma, Winnie has been guided to develop more and more courage to gradually reveal her true self. Traumatic memories have become only one part of her experience, and begin to fade as other memories do [13]. In parallel, Winnie's emotional situation is reflected in an increasing number of positive adjectives. For instance,

Ex 8:

Winnie: "Very fancy, fine porcelain. And the style is good too. See how nicely she sits in her chair, so comfortable-looking in her manner." [2]

In this example, after open communication with Pearl, Winnie uses juxtaposed positive adjectives like "fancy", "fine", "good" and "comfortable-looking" to describe a figurine of the Kitchen God's Wife, which is a stark contrast to her earlier reaction to the statue of the Kitchen God. Talking about one's emotional experiences enables the person to integrate the traumatic memory into their own chronology of the past [12]. Hence, Winnie's more frequent use of positive adjectives expresses a sense of relief after revealing the secrets buried in her heart for years. It also demonstrates that she "is ready to engage more actively in the world" [8].

4.2.2 Grammatical representation of recovery

At the grammatical level, the mixing of narrative tenses also represents the recovery of trauma. It is a slow process in which traumatised victims regain their temporal perception and cognitive abilities. The term "temporal perception" refers to "a personality trait in which an individual perceives, experiences and acts in relation to time" [14]. It is difficult to describe trauma in everyday terms because victims' temporal perception is weak, and the key to recovery is to improve this perception. For example,

Ex 9:

Winnie: "Now I don't have to worry. For so many years I thought he was going to fly out of a closet, or jump underneath my bed." [2]

In this example, although Winnie also crosses the tenses past and present, there are explicit adverbials of time "now" and "for so many years" in her discourse, suggesting that she is gradually recovering from the marital trauma. After a traumatic event, the traumatised often remain in a state of seclusion. However, the possibilities for healing often depend on social connections, such as through witnessing or compassion [15]. Therefore, by creating new connections with others, Winnie is able to work through trauma with the love and support of family and friends. The appearance of the time adverbials "now" and "for so many years" marks the survivor's ability to distinguish between past and present, her improving perception of time [7], and her gradual escape from the dissociation caused by the trauma.

4.2.3 Pragmatic representation of recovery

At the pragmatic level, assertive speech acts play a crucial role in Winnie's efforts to deal with her trauma. The illocutionary meaning of assertives is the speaker's action to make the hearer believe in the proposition's content [16]. People around Winnie use assertive speech acts to help Winnie establish security and reconnect with normal life [8]. With their love and support, Winnie can learn to take control of her life and create a new future, which is mainly represented by assertive speech acts. It can be seen in the following examples:

Ex 10:

Jimmy: "Baby-ah, shh-shh, don't think about this anymore, you are in America now." [2]

In this example, Jimmy uses assertive speech acts when Winnie is intruded on by traumatic memories, whose illocutionary purpose is to constantly convince Winnie of "a secured defensive position of basic safety" [8]. Herman notes that recovery is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections, including the basic capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy [8]. Therefore, it can be seen that Jimmy's sincere and destined love plays a crucial role in speeding up Winnie's recovery process.

Ex 11:

Winnie: "Because then you would know how weak I was. You would think I was a bad mother."

Pearl: "I wouldn't have thought that."

Winnie: "Yes you would. If I had told you--then it would be even worse!"

Pearl: "I never thought you were a bad mother." [2]

In this example, Winnie's assertives indicate that she fears whether her story will make her appear a cowardly and foolish mother. Although the wounds can be treated to result in great relief from the acute anguish, any hurt, be it physical or mental, is almost impossible to be recovered with no scar. Moreover, the telling of the trauma story inevitably plunges the survivor into profound grief [8]. Therefore, it takes a lot of guts for Winnie to voluntarily relive the pain of the traumatic event and to become more open to "new forms of engagement with children" [8]. According to Straus, Winnie's story-telling performs a special kind of action that clearly attempts to affect her hearer [17]. Consequently, Pearl repeats assertive speech acts that express strong affirmation, aiming to convince Winnie that she is not a horrible mother but rather a strong woman. As the listener, Pearl plays an important role in the healing process, as Felman and Laub state, "Only when the victim passes on the story to the listener who is outside of it can trauma be healed" [9].

5 CONCLUSION

With a Chinese American female novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* as a case, this paper makes an elaborate interpretation on the linguistic representation of Chinese American women's trauma and its recovery from the perspective of Literary Pragmatics. For the linguistic representations of trauma, the symptoms and causes of the female characters' trauma are analysed at three levels. Lexically, women tend to use hedges as a form of self-protection to avoid conflict. Grammatically, Wen Fu, the perpetrator, usually adopts imperative if-conditional sentences to threaten or coax Winnie to obey his commands. In contrast, Winnie's trauma narrative uses a mixture of two narrative tenses to represent the profound effects of the trauma of marital and sexual violence imposed on her by Wen Fu. Pragmatically, Wen Fu and the surrounding elders frequently use directive speech acts to force Winnie to give unquestioning obedience to them. Moreover, the unresolved trauma caused by such speech acts is passed on to Pearl for generations.

For the linguistic representations of recovery, the love and support of the afflicted and the efforts of the traumatised are discussed at three levels. Lexically, women tend to use an increasing number of positive adjectives to express relief. Grammatically, adverbials of time also represent coping with trauma. Pragmatically, families use assertive speech acts to offer Winnie security and confidence. The assertives that Winnie and Pearl use show the final overcoming of their trauma. The above different linguistic forms at the three levels demonstrate that the recovery of Chinese American women's trauma is a tough and complicated process.

This paper is a tentative exploration into the traumatic representation and linguistic forms to explore women's trauma and recovery from a pragmatic literary perspective, focusing on the discourse of the characters in *The Kitchen God's Wife*. It unfolds a whole new vein of Chinese American female literature and trauma literary analysis, providing a good illustration to demonstrate the feasible cutting edge of Literary Pragmatics in interpreting literary works. However, due to word limits, the conclusions cannot be taken for granted as replicable in all the examples from other texts at the present stage. Therefore, in terms of future research, the literary pragmatic exploration of this novel can give prominence to other aspects such as implicature, relevance, deixis and etc.

COMPETING INTERESTS

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SYMPOSIUM: FATE, DIVINITY, AND GENDERS IN LOVE

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Abstract: In *Symposium*, Aristophanes introduces a myth of trigender: male, female, and their union, asserting that beings were once split in half by Zeus. This separation compels individuals to spend their earthly lives in search of reunion, ultimately striving for the island of the blessed. This paper investigates the implications of Aristophanes' claims regarding the nature of love as both a fatalistic force and a divine mission. It explores whether Plato hints at a predetermined aspect of love or emphasizes its role as an aspirational journey of the soul. Additionally, the essay examines how the existence of separate genders influences the pursuit of love and the potential for reunion. What does it mean for individuals of a single gender in this framework? How does this framework shape our understanding of love's mission? By addressing these questions, the essay aims to elucidate the complexities of love in *Symposium*, highlighting the tension between Aristophanes' myth and the broader philosophical discourse initiated by prior speakers and echoed by Socrates. Ultimately, this paper will attempt to comment upon the existential and metaphysical dimensions of love as a quest for unity and fulfillment.

Keywords: Love; Gender; Mythology; Fatalism; Divine purpose; Soul

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context of the *Symposium*

Aristophanes, in *Symposium*, makes an outstanding argument centered on the origin of love. As a poet, he crafts a fantastical narrative concerning Zeus's plan, which holds significant weight in the historical discourse on love [1].

According to Aristophanes, when humans are not yet descended to Earth, they existed as one gender, a union of male and female, or the "circleman", possessing complete strength and virtue. Upon becoming mortal, however, Zeus splits the union into two, like spitting the yolk from the egg white. He then instructed Apollo to twist their faces and rearrange their persons, creating wrinkles and tying a skin at the navel. Now, the two halves of the union, each obtaining half the strength and virtue, would go about looking for each other in the humanly world. To facilitate their union and fulfill their longing, Zeus invented the distinction of genders and sanctioned marriage. Souls that disobey this search for union, however, would be punished by being split into another half by Zeus [2].

1.2 Purpose and Research Questions

Upon understanding this context, three key points stand out. First, the fatality in how pairs of souls were united in the heaven. Second, the search of the partner as an obligation to obey Zeus. And finally, the fulfilment of the divine mission that gives the partner chances to reunite into their natural state of power and virtue.

Referring to the key ideas above, it is generally of interest to many scholars the implications of such a story, and how the story reflects the philosophical thinkings presented in the *Symposium*. This paper focuses on Aristophanes' contributions to the discussion by introducing the idea that love is a heavenly mission and delving into the implicit implications that Plato attempts to convey. This leads to the central question: How does Aristophanes' myth of trigender inform our understanding of love, gender, and divinity within the broader context of Plato's *Symposium*?

2 ARISTOPHANES' MYTH OF TRIGENDERS

2.1 Concept Overview

In Aristophanes' view, the genders where of two kinds, which does not align with the contemporary perceived meaning of "gender". Indeed, the concept of genders appears to be somewhat obscure and almost inconsequential in the discussion of Zeus's plan. Rather, the union was a single entity that embodies the complete strength and virtue of individual souls, and the genders of males and females serve as the qualities of the two halves, solely purposed to remain in union in the earthly world [3].

Therefore, when discussing Aristophanes' story, it becomes easier to understand the origins of gender as Zeus' mere invention of two distinct souls split from the same egg, resembling two pieces of a puzzle perfectly matched only to each other [4]. The fact that the two genders were a material needed for the halves to continuously search for and remain with the other highlights the stage set for such an idea that reunion was a heavenly mission imposed by Zeus.

2.2 Implications of Zeus' Fragmentation

Zeus's fragmentation holds significant implications. In curating this myth, Aristophanes concludes that love is of divine capacities and will be the ultimate mission for souls descended to Earth. Aristophanes states that his speech explains "the source of our desire to love each other," adding, "Love is born into every human being; it calls back the halves of our original nature together; it tries to make one out of two and heal the wound of human nature. Each of us, then, is a 'matching half' of a human whole...and each of us is always seeking the half that matches him" [1]. In such, Aristophanes makes a beauty of love that is intended to cure the wounds of a heart.

In comparison, there was also the ugly; Not only did early humans have both sets of sexual organs, Aristophanes reports, but they were outfitted with two faces, four hands, and four legs. These monstrosities were very fast – moving by way of cartwheels – and they were also quite powerful. So powerful, in fact, that the gods were nervous for their dominion. This rather arrogant and inelegant image was a first draw of Plato to satirize such a fantastical story, and to intentionally mock poets that creates disillusionment in truth.

Nevertheless, the divinity and beauty stand out. Aristophanes places demands and expectations on love heavily: "[When] a person meets the half that is his very own," he exclaims, "something wonderful happens: the two are struck from their senses by love, by a sense of belonging to one another, and by desire, and they don't want to be separated from one another, not even for a moment. These are people who finish out their lives together and still cannot say what it is they want from one another" [1]. Nowadays, these views are quoted by the romantic winged scholars in which to infer a divinity in love, and an idea of eternal love.

Though in anyways being beautiful portioned in the above, it is hard to infer how Zeus' fragmentation has been set forth by Aristophanes. Whether it is a pure imaginative story, for the sake that he himself is a poet that is fantastical, or an inference derived from judgement of love. Popular disputes remain. On the basis, Aristophanes presents his myth of the origin of love as a mere narrative rather than grounded arguments. He reasons Zeus' fragmentation by stating: "Zeus, in his fear of their power, decided to cut them in half... so that they might be made weaker"[1]. To Aristophanes, the union of genders in the power of love have been to conquer the gods, harming their authority, and was henceforth halved by Zeus. However, we find an oxymoron in Aristophanes' reasoning, though minor, when he claims punishments of Zeus to split those halves in half again if they did not find their divine couple, as if Zeus had brought on such a mission, forgetting about his own intention of splitting them apart in the first place. However, scholars today place negligence on such inconsistency and tend to place more focus on the divinity of love, favoring the romantic view.

In comparison, there are also pessimistic views. Some take the obscureness of trigender, suspecting either if one could have been single gendered from origin or if one shall not be found in their mortality. There have been two ways to reply. One of which is claiming how the existence of a single gender might reflect a tragic limitation imposed by Zeus, suggesting that some souls are destined to remain incomplete in their earthly existence. The second response aligns with Socratic thought, positing that love is inherently divine and that true fulfillment can only be achieved in the afterlife, once the soul reunites with its other half in the realm of the gods [5]. This perspective implies that while earthly love may be a pursuit fraught with challenges, it ultimately serves as a pathway toward a higher spiritual connection, reinforcing the idea that the goal of love transcends mortal experiences and resides in the divine. To this cause, the pessimistic are ultimately disseminated to the belief that love and the beauty of love shall be only achieved in the isle of the blessed, thus not any humanly deeds will ultimately achieve, with equality across all being.

In this way, the many different interpretations of the myth of Aristophanes constructs a mythical and unresolved discussion, rather complementing the fantastical existence of love, being the largest drawback of his speech, though upbringing some other expectations such as eternal marriages, mandated marriages, the abortion of divorcing laws, as well as other constraints on love and relationships that can be rather extreme to derive from the ugliness of the myth.

3 LOVE AS FATE

3.1 Fatalistic Interpretations

If the origin of love ought to be what Aristophanes proposes, then it must argue or constitute that love is fatal, undecided, and doomed from the beginning of birth. Instead, this idea soon becomes long-lasting and part of the integral view of how people today view love. But is it grounded?

To consider this, many concerns and reasonings can be raised. If people were to be assigned the unconditional quest of love, this means not that people are doomed to love since their origin, but rather their attraction, addiction, and desire for love is universally embedded in the soul, far from what romanticism has seen it today. Therefore, we must clarify that in reciprocal of what people rather assume, that true love will be constantly in search of one, to recognize that one shall be eternally and essentially inclined in the quest for true love.

Also, the procurement of how Aristophanes presents that only the two that formed a union would perfectly match each other shall also be reconsidered, as many people could deem their relationship a mismatch after some type of attachment, and that may prove Aristophanes' assumption of natural attraction false. But, in any case, the deeper view of love as fate, being one belief center to Aristophanes' myth shall be cited again in the case that fate has driven people to endure pain, mismatch, and challenge to test one's courage, referring to how speakers in prior have showcased the prerequisites of love, and to qualify one to surpass barriers and arrive at their ultimate mission.

3.2 Tensions with Free Will

The love as a fate implication in Aristophanes' myth once again claims some attention of those that attempt to justify some tension with free will. This essay rethinks two approaches in explanation.

The fundamental response links to the next key concept of Aristophanes' myth, love as a divine mission, that through the embedded instinct of search for love, there shall be no free from origin that appeals to the individual, for their quest for love has been obligated, trained, and towards their instinctive addiction to beauty. And thus, no question of free will emerges in the situation of pursuing the doomed and fatal love.

The second view will build on the first to extend a probable path of free will to be injected into this view. For, accumulatively discussed in the *Symposium*, individuals who bear true love will be granted into the isle of the blessed, will call to question the choice of whether individuals long for the isle of the blessed, in which most do, but there are exceptions. In this case, there may ultimately arise a tension in free will and the fatal love, where one may not be attentive to pursue being in the isle of the blessed, but still be obligated in search of such a love by the innate desires towards such beauty. The validation of this argument shall be considered together with the question of whether longingness for heaven is a shared instinct of humanity that inscribes no choice, or a diverged path that differs across souls which grants a possibility of free will to make such decisions.

4 LOVE AS A DIVINE MISSION

4.1 Defining the Mission of Love

Not only Aristophanes, but the *Symposium* itself also stresses the divinity of love. Phaedrus brings in the prior concept of courage and bravery, and the willingness to sacrifice for love as a quality of love, citing a myth of Alcestis and Orpheus. Then, the view of the earthly and the heavenly Aphrodites is apparent, representing desires and love of beauty respectively, and love as medicine to virtue [6]. Nevertheless, Aristophanes and Plato come in to round the discussion.

Indeed, Aristophanes presents that, from the side of origin, love has been doomed as a divine mission, and those that does not step on the journey of curing love shall be punished by Zeus. The divinity exists in two parts. First, the fatality of love, an almost fantastical view that supports the notion of searching for love in the desire to comeback to original form, and to acquire power and strength. Second, the idea that the couples of loves will eventually be brought to reunion by gravity and natural attraction, ultimately counting towards the doom of fate and the godliness of love as itself.

However, while Aristophanes plays on to invent his own myth, Plato comes in to piece the prior thinking together. Nonetheless, Plato fundamentally claims that everyone's perception and argument on love is merely based on their experiences and personal affections on love. Whilst he does help Aristophanes take the myth a step further, though taking Diotima as a reference. He claims that the search for love is a search for beauty, commonly up a ladder of love, ranging from a beautiful body to all beautiful bodies, beautiful souls, beauty of laws and institutions, beauty of knowledge, and finally the love of beauty itself [1]. On the one hand, his ladder helps consolidate the distinction of earthly and heavenly love, filling in the scales in between how people traverse through one type to another, to the sublime, summarizing the idea of excellence of love and the segregation to the two Aphrodites. On the other hand, Plato helps clarify the idea that love is divine, or more specifically, the love of beauty itself is divine. In this way, Plato makes it more probable that certain loves can only be achieved in heaven and are impossible to be achieved on an earthly basis, helping the pessimistic views around how some deter themselves undoomed of love by reminding the unachievable nature of the true love of beauty and accentuating the divinity of love.

4.2 The Pursuit of Reunion

Plato's ladder of love further insinuates ideas that seem somewhat controversial around Aristophanes' own account. Many may identify the pursuit of love as ambivalent and an oxymoron as it brings power and the isle of the blessed but also faces another split in the afterlife. However, the pursuit of beauty itself fuels the explanation of such motivation.

The pursuit of reunion, therefore, is not merely a quest for physical or emotional completeness but a spiritual ascent toward ultimate beauty and truth [7]. This aligns with Plato's broader philosophical project, which emphasizes the importance of transcending the material world to achieve a higher state of being. The reunion, in this context, symbolizes the soul's return to its original, undivided state, where it can fully realize its potential and participate in the divine.

The ladder of love also addresses a potential paradox within Aristophanes' myth: If the pursuit of love is divinely ordained, why does it often lead to pain and suffering? Plato suggests that these challenges are integral to the process of spiritual growth. By navigating the complexities of earthly love, individuals develop the virtues necessary to ascend the ladder and ultimately achieve true fulfillment. This perspective transforms the pursuit of reunion from a passive acceptance of fate to an active engagement with the divine, where free will and personal agency play a crucial role [8].

5 GENDER AND LOVE

In Aristophanes' view, gender serves as a decision of Zeus subordinate to the missionary of love and to the fulfillment of desires in holding two parts of a union together at their earthly deeds.

This perspective raises several critical questions about the nature of gender and its role in love. If gender is merely a tool for facilitating reunion, does it possess any intrinsic value or significance? Or is it simply a means to an end, a

temporary construct that will ultimately be transcended in the afterlife? These questions challenge traditional notions of gender identity and invite readers to reconsider the relationship between gender and love. Moreover, Aristophanes' myth raises concerns about individuals who do not fit neatly into traditional gender categories. What does it mean for those who identify as non-binary or transgender, or for those who do not experience romantic or sexual attraction? Are they excluded from the divine mission of love, or do they represent alternative pathways to spiritual fulfillment? These questions challenge the limitations of Aristophanes' binary framework and suggests a temporary need for a more inclusive understanding of love and gender, in which future philosophers dedicated in. Contemporary scholars have offered various interpretations of Aristophanes' myth considering these concerns. Some argue that the myth should be read as a metaphor for the inherent human desire for connection and wholeness, rather than a literal endorsement of traditional gender roles [4]. Others suggest that the myth can be reinterpreted to accommodate a more fluid and inclusive understanding of gender, where individuals are free to define their own identities and pursue love in ways that align with their authentic selves [9].

6 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Aristophanes' myth of trigender in Plato's *Symposium* presents a sophisticated and multi-interpreted view of love, gender, and divinity. While the myth offers a strong vision of love as a divine mission, it also raises critical questions about the nature of fate, free will, and gender identity. By examining these questions, this essay discovers the tension between Aristophanes' myth and the broader philosophical discourse initiated by Plato. Ultimately, this exploration has revealed that love, as depicted in *Symposium*, is not simply a matter of fate or divinity but an active and ongoing process of self-discovery and spiritual transcendence. The pursuit of reunion, whether it leads to earthly fulfillment or remains a longing for the afterlife, serves as a catalyst for individuals to strive for a higher personal discovery of beauty and truth.

Ultimately, further research could explore the reception and interpretation of Aristophanes' myth in later philosophical and literary traditions. Additionally, it would be valuable to examine the ways in which contemporary discussions of gender and sexuality can inform our understanding of love in *Symposium*. By continuing to engage with these questions, scholars gain new insights into the enduring power and complexity of love as a fundamental and universal aspect of the human condition.

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