

**The Theory of Cultural Empowerment:  
China's Cultural Consciousness in Marching  
Toward High-Quality Development**

Xinhua Institute



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## Introduction

Culture, in essence, is the cultivation of humanity. It embodies the values and norms of conduct that humanity has distilled through transforming nature, pursuing innovation, and engaging in interaction and cooperation. Economic activities, such as production, exchange, distribution, and consumption, are invariably imbued with humanistic pursuits and reflect the underlying essence of civilization.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has pointed out that we should deepen the development of socialist cultural-ethical progress in urban and rural areas, optimize the supply of cultural products and services, and empower economic and social development with culture.<sup>①</sup> The Outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China also explicitly sets forth the objective to "empower economic and social development with culture."<sup>②</sup>

As an ancient civilization with a long and continuous history, China has always maintained cultural consciousness and upheld its cultural subjectivity. Empowering economic and social development with culture is a vivid manifestation of staying confident in our culture and fulfilling our responsibilities as a major civilization. It is a strategic and inevitable choice made by China against the backdrop of profound economic transformation, the building of a culturally advanced nation, and the upgrading of the global industries.

When the "fresh wellspring" of culture empowers the "vast ocean" of the economy, when a profound cultural heritage pro-

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<sup>①</sup> "Xi Urges Economic Powerhouses to Shoulder Greater Responsibilities for National Development—Deliberation with Jiangsu Delegates," *Xinhua News Agency*, March 5, 2025.

<sup>②</sup> "Outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (2026–2030)," March 13, 2026.

vides strong momentum for consumption, when enduring cultural nourishment helps enhance the effectiveness of social governance, and when culture generates powerful momentum for high-quality development—these forces provide strong impetus for advancing Chinese modernization.

Empowering economic and social development with culture entails a profound methodology: forging the soul through value guidance, consolidating the foundation through humanistic roots, achieving enduring success by upholding fundamental principles and breaking new ground, and advancing progress through systems thinking. The power of culture is being comprehensively integrated into every field and phase of economic and social life, serving as a vital fulcrum for driving high-quality development.

Empowering economic and social development with culture offers profound insights into the global modernization process. Resolving the spiritual crisis of cultural nihilism, breaking through the realistic dilemmas of economic growth, addressing the prominent issue of humanistic deficiency, defusing the potential risks of social disorder, and overcoming the developmental challenges of urban-rural imbalance, one after another, Chinese solutions rooted in the soil of Chinese culture are contributing Chinese wisdom to the advancement of human society.

Nourished by culture, all things flourish.

The legacy of history, the responsibilities of the present, and the aspirations for the future all converge in culture and blend into the cultural bloodline. May the light of culture illuminate the path of development, its strength empower the exploration of modernization, and its wisdom chart a beautiful future.

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## **Chapter I: The Generative Logic of Empowering Economic and Social Development with Culture**

President Xi Jinping's proposition to "empower economic and social development with culture" has hoisted the cultural sail to drive high-quality development. Focusing on the evolution of global competition and cooperation among civilizations, this significant assertion represents a contemporary sublimation of Marxist cultural theory rooted in the essential characteristics of Chinese modernization and based on the transition of driving forces and the change in the principal contradiction in Chinese society during the new stage of development.

### **1. An Inevitable Requirement for the New Stage of Development**

China's economic development has transitioned from a stage of high-speed growth to a stage of high-quality development. Under the guidance of the new development philosophy featuring innovative, coordinated, green, open, and shared growth, the economy is undergoing a profound transformation from "accumulation in quantity" to a "leap in quality." The connotation and requirements of development have undergone fundamental changes; it requires not only the "hard support" of material factors but also the "soft empowerment" of culture. Meanwhile, global competition increasingly manifests as a contest of cultural soft power. Against this backdrop, the contemporary mission of empowering economic and social development with culture has emerged, serving as a key measure to promote the coordinated development of material and cultural-ethical civilizations and to enhance the country's overall national strength.

### **I.1 A vital support for meeting the people's aspirations for a better life**

The yearning for a better life has always been the value anchor and eternal pursuit of humanity. "The people's aspirations for a better life is our goal."<sup>①</sup> Entering the new era, the principal contradiction in Chinese society has evolved into the "contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing need for a better life." Following China's completion of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and with per capita GDP exceeding \$13,000 during the 14th Five-Year Plan period, the Chinese people now cherish higher-level spiritual aspirations. They yearn to realize aesthetic expression, communal belonging, and value identity in their ever-richer productive and daily lives. Consequently, material supply imbued with cultural connotation has become a "rigid demand." This leap in demand from "material abundance" to "spiritual richness" signifies that culture has become a vital support for satisfying the people's aspirations for a better life, and cultural empowerment has emerged as an urgent necessity of the development of our times.

### **I.2 An intrinsic requirement for the transition of growth drivers in economic and social development**

"Culture is a vital fulcrum for promoting high-quality development."<sup>②</sup> China's growth drivers are shifting from reliance on traditional factor inputs—such as land and capital—toward technological innovation, human capital, and higher total factor productivity. Breaking through resource bottlenecks calls for

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<sup>①</sup>*An Introduction to Xi Jinping Thought on Economy*, Higher Education Press & People's Publishing House, 2025, p. 54.

<sup>②</sup>*Selected Important Documents Since the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Volume I)*, Central Party Literature Press, 2024, p. 573.



new production factors; achieving industrial upgrading demands new substantive content; and building an innovation ecosystem requires a new enabling environment. Cultural empowerment has become an indispensable and key support for the transition of growth drivers: By transcending physical limitations, cultural resources open up a growth path that does not rely on resource depletion; by injecting aesthetic value and emotional resonance, culture elevates the value chain upmarket; and by fostering an entrepreneurial spirit and respect for contracts, culture supplies both momentum and order to economic and social development.

### **I.3 A strategic choice amid the evolution of the global landscape of competition and cooperation among civilizations**

Amid the accelerated evolution of major changes unseen in a century, global challenges become more prominent. Cultural influence, the sense of value identity, and international discourse power have emerged as crucial variables. Enhancing cultural creativity, appeal, and guiding power has become a vital proposition of our times. When a country's culture earns the recognition and admiration of other nations and peoples, that culture constitutes a vital resource for the country's soft power.<sup>①</sup> The collective memory, value consensus, and national spirit embedded within culture serve as an essential source of strength for overcoming various risks and challenges on the road ahead. Empowering economic and social development with culture aims precisely to forge cultural soft power into a solid pillar for building a strong nation and participating in global governance. It translates a rich civilization-al legacy into tangible international competitiveness, making it a strategic choice that aligns with the changing times.

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<sup>①</sup>Joseph Nye. "Think Again: Soft Power," *Social Sciences Abroad*, 2006 (4), p. 90.

## 2. The Connotations and Essence of Cultural Empowerment

In essence, cultural empowerment draws upon culture as its fundamental nourishment. Through deep integration across all sectors, it internalizes concepts, spirits, and aesthetics into the value foundations and practical momentum of economic and social development. This process forges an organic unity between theoretical cognition and practical pathways, while promoting the coordinated advancement of material and cultural-ethical civilizations.

### 2.1 Culture is the value core deeply embedded in economic and social development.

This serves as the logical starting point for how cultural empowerment is realized. As Xi Jinping noted in *Zhejiang, China: A New Vision for Development*, "Culture endows economic development with profound humanistic value."<sup>①</sup> Culture is not an external ornament or a mere tool detached from economic and social life; rather, it permeates the very fabric of institutional design, production and exchange, consumption experiences, and social relations.

Through its inherent ideals, convictions, moral norms, and aesthetic standards, culture establishes the meaning of values and determines the direction, boundaries, and heights of development, guards against the pitfalls of utilitarianism and the "spiritual impoverishment amid material abundance," and answers the fundamental questions of for whom development is pursued, by whom it is carried out, and who shares its benefits. In doing so, it represents a fundamental transcendence of the "rational economic man" hypothesis, the material-oriented thinking, and the logic of capital, pointing instead toward the well-rounded development of

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<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping. *Zhejiang, China: A New Vision for Development*, Zhejiang Publishing United Group & Zhejiang People's Publishing House, 2007, p. 149.

the individual and the all-round progress of society.

## **2.2 Culture permeates all fields and the entire process of economic and social development.**

This is the operational mechanism of cultural empowerment. Economic and social development require solid and broad-based dynamic support; the power of culture invariably integrates into material productive activities in a way that "moistens things in silence." As a core value, culture shapes common norms, stimulates innovation and enterprise, and enhances social identity, driving high-quality economic and social development with stronger cohesion and capacity for implementation. As a medium for integration, the deep fusion of culture with primary, secondary, and tertiary industries reshapes industrial forms, upgrades the value chains of traditional industries, and helps emerging and future industries break new ground, unleashing the "multiplier effect" of "Culture Plus." As a factor of production, cultural resources participate in value creation. Through creative transformation, they directly engage in the economic cycle and open new frontiers for economic growth. As a support for governance, culture nourishes the spirit of the people and builds social consensus, providing a mechanism for "soft integration" in urban and rural development, ensuring that society maintains both order and vitality amid diverse development.

## **2.3 Culture facilitates the synchronized advancement of economic prosperity and humanistic flourishing.**

This is the ultimate outcome of cultural empowerment. The deep integration of culture into economic and social operations endows development with greater organizational efficiency and competitiveness, promoting a dual enhancement of efficiency and quality of development. At the same time, economic and social development is the practical unfolding of culture; the evolu-

tion of economic forms is, in essence, the logical manifestation of the continuous externalization and development of culture. When culture-as a driver, medium, and factor-is comprehensively integrated into every link and field of development, the process of economic and social development also becomes a process of cultural preservation, cultural promotion, and the accumulation of cultural values. This ensures that economic upgrading and humanistic sublimation advance in tandem, and that economic prosperity and humanistic flourishing are organically unified, transforming the historical phenomenon where "places with highly developed cultures also lead in economic development"<sup>①</sup> into an inevitable law of development.

### **3. Contemporary Innovation of Marxist Cultural Theory**

The important assertion of "empowering economic and social development with culture" represents Xi Jinping's inheritance and innovation of the theory of cultural agency of authors of Marxist classics. It is the practical manifestation of cultural confidence in the economic and social arenas, and the important pathway through which Chinese modernization creates a new form of human advancement.

#### **3.1 The inheritance and development of the Marxist theory of cultural agency**

The assertion that "culture empowers economic and social development" inherits the theoretical essence of the authors of Marxist classics-most notably the concept of "spiritual productive forces." Through dialectical thinking, it advances and innovates upon this tradition by expanding culture's active effect from

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<sup>①</sup>*An Introduction to Xi Jinping Thought on Economy*, Higher Education Press & People's Publishing House, 2025, p. 153.

the traditional framework of the "superstructure" acting upon the "economic base" into a systemic driving force that permeates all economic and social fields. The authors of Marxist classics laid the theoretical foundation that culture exerts an active reaction on the economic base. Drawing on China's practical experience, Xi Jinping has broken through the existing cognitive paradigms to reveal that culture is no longer an external variable in economic and social development, but an intrinsic core element of the entire process. He profoundly clarified that through multi-dimensional pathways—such as value guidance and resource transformation—culture integrates into every link of development to become a vital productive force and driver, further enriching and developing Marxist theory. This important assertion represents a contemporary sublimation of the Marxist theory of cultural agency by upholding fundamental principles while breaking new ground within the process of Chinese modernization.

### **3.2 The practical manifestation of cultural confidence in the arena of economic and social development**

Marxism illuminates Chinese civilization with the light of truth, while fine traditional Chinese culture provides profound nourishment for adapting Marxism to the Chinese context and the needs of the times. Through the "Second Integration," Chinese people's cultural confidence has been greatly enhanced: people now have a deeper understanding of culture's status and role, a more deliberate commitment to cultural construction, and a more proactive ability to harness cultural power. Cultural consciousness is the epistemological premise for empowering economic and social development with culture. By grasping the laws governing cultural development and the mechanisms by which culture influences economy and society, we have moved beyond the one-sided view that treats culture merely as an instrument. Cultur-

al confidence, rooted in cultural subjectivity, consolidates the foundation for cultural empowerment and enables Marxism and China's fine traditional culture to be mutually compatible and mutually reinforcing in economic and social practice, becoming a cultural force that drives Chinese modernization. Ultimately, this practice points toward the deep-seated establishment of cultural confidence: cultural empowerment validates the contemporary value of Chinese culture through tangible achievements, providing cultural confidence with solid support that spans from history into the future.

### **3.3 An important pathway for creating a new form of human advancement**

Chinese modernization is the modernization of coordinated material and cultural-ethical advancement. Empowering economic and social development with culture ultimately aims at the symbiosis and mutual prosperity of economic and social benefits, realizing the synchronized advancement of economic prosperity and humanistic flourishing, and achieving the organic unity of material and cultural-ethical civilizations. By forging fine traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture into the core of development, the cultural accumulation of five millennia extends from the depths of history into the fertile soil of the present and is transformed into an underlying momentum that secures steady, long-term economic and social progress. Advancing along this path, by deeply understanding the laws of cultural development and empowering economic and social development with culture, we will surely reach a new height of civilization where advanced material prosperity and spiritual richness illuminate and reinforce one another. Through the grand practice of Chinese modernization, we will continually open new horizons for a new form of human advancement.

## Chapter II: The Chinese Practice of Empowering Economic and Social Development with Culture

Empowering economic and social development with culture is a distinctively practice-oriented approach.<sup>①</sup> What is the role of culture, and how does it empower? Serving as a "propeller" for economic development, a "navigation light" for political civilization, and a "cohesive agent" for social harmony, culture—under the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Culture—has injected powerful impetus into the advancement of Chinese modernization. As a factor of production, a medium of integration, a foundation for governance, and a source of core value, culture is deeply integrated into every link and field of economic and social development, creating economic highlights, unleashing consumption vitality, nourishing good social governance, and mobilizing the driving forces of development.

### 1. Creating Economic Highlights with Culture

When a country faces a critical period of economic structural transformation and upgrading, only by continuously creating new productive forces and persistently activating new drivers of development can it promote high-quality economic growth. By profoundly recognizing the status and role of culture, China draws wisdom and strength from the long and continuous treasury of Chinese civilization, using the "fresh wellspring" of culture to empower the "vast ocean" of the economy.

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① Shuang Chuanxue. "Empowering Economic and Social Development with Culture," *Party Building*, 2025(5).

## I.I Innovation drives the cultivation of new quality productive forces

The spirit of innovation, such as "Doing away with the old and establishing the new," is a precious quality embodied in China's fine traditional culture. Science and technology innovation that keeps pace with the times has become a principal force driving China's high-quality economic development.

Culture is the "wing" of China's scientific and technological innovation, continuously expanding the boundaries of innovation and guiding the emergence of new quality productive forces. The births of China's spacecraft-Shenzhou, Chang'e, Zhurong-carry forward the Chinese imagination of deep space that dates back to antiquity. Each breakthrough in aerospace technology and industry marks a solid step by the Chinese people from "daring to imagine" to "daring to act."

On April 19, 2026, the humanoid-robot half marathon kicked off in Yizhuang, Beijing."Lightning," the humanoid robot representing the Qitian Dasheng team of Shenzhen Honor Intelligent Technology Development Co., Ltd., won the race with a net time of 50 minutes and 26 seconds-surpassing the world record set by human athletes. Culture has broadened application scenarios for humanoid robots, helping these robots to gain widespread popularity and thereby accelerating industrial development. According to data released by the technology research and consulting firm Omdia, Chinese humanoid-robot companies accounted for 90 percent of global shipment orders in 2025.<sup>①</sup>

Culture is the "soul" of China's scientific and technological innovation, endowing new quality productive forces with a more

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<sup>①</sup>People's Daily "Chisu Jinsheng" Column. "China's Humanoid Robots Rapidly Scale Up: How They Captured 90% of Global Orders," People's Daily App, 3 March 2026. Full text at <https://www.peopleapp.com/column/30051542465-500007374872>.



distinct humanistic character. The principle of "technology for good" ensures that technological activities and their applications genuinely enhance people's well-being and promote social progress.

In 2025, China entered the top ten in the Global Innovation Index, and the added value of the digital economy is expected to reach nearly RMB 50 trillion. By coordinating the application of new technologies with job transitions to create new employment opportunities, the country generated more than 12 million new urban jobs nationwide.

China is committed to continuously strengthening the integration of scientific and technological development with the protection and improvement of people's livelihoods, focusing on solving problems in healthcare, eldercare, and education. Exoskeleton robots are expected to reduce labor burdens by more than 50%; intelligent bionic prosthetic arms and AI-assisted visual aids for the blind people have significantly improved the quality of life for persons with disabilities; smart eldercare systems make home-based care services more attentive; and positive-energy algorithms help build a cleaner and healthier cyberspace.

### **1.2 "Culture +" promotes industrial quality improvement and upgrading**

To activate new drivers of development in the real economy-especially in traditional manufacturing-and to make products better aligned with market demand, China, from 2024, further clarified the development approach of "revitalizing industry with culture." Culture is integrated into economic activity as a composite innovation factor, opening up new "Culture Plus" tracks for economic growth. By leveraging culture's strong associative links and coupling effects, cross-sectoral integration across economic fields is achieved, thereby promoting the improvement of industrial quali-

ty and upgrading.

Chinese aesthetics + apparel industry, traditional Chinese medicine theory + health and eldercare industry, Guochao(China-chic trend) culture + digital economy, traditional construction techniques + modern architecture ... Culture is deeply integrated with primary, secondary, and tertiary industries, continuously enriching new business forms and new scenarios for industrial economic development.

Jingdezhen in Jiangxi Province, China's Porcelain Capital, is home to more than 60,000 artisanal porcelain workshops across the city. A single cultural-creative street has attracted over 20,000 artisans. Traditional porcelain culture and the modern industrial chain complement one another, drawing creators from the United States, France, Singapore, and other countries. At its peak, more than 5,000 international creators were present-giving rise to a distinctive phenomenon of "cultural migration."

During the 2026 Spring Festival in the Year of the Horse, traditional carriers of outstanding Chinese culture, such as lanterns, New Year floral decorations, and festive clothing, were in strong demand overseas. After the festival, Yiwu's "World Supermarket" opened, and China-chic jewelry and other innovative products with high cultural added value garnered rising interest from foreign buyers, leading to steadily increasing orders. "The link between Chinese manufacturing and global demand is growing ever closer," said Canadian buyer Amir.

### **1.3 Deepening culture-tourism integration enhances economic returns**

"Broad reading and wide travel broaden horizons." China is committed to the deep integration of culture and tourism, awakening people's inner yearning for "poetry and the distant horizon," and, through a coordinated package of policy measures, con-

verting that yearning into tangible economic activity that yields real economic benefits.

On the one hand, cultural content and digital creativity are being used to enrich the substance and core competitiveness of tourism products, achieving the goal of "shaping tourism with culture." Destinations such as Harbin in Heilongjiang Province and the Altay region in Xinjiang have become highly popular, drawing increasing numbers of visitors who come to experience the vibrant local life and the unique charm of the regional culture. "Culture + tourism" has not only stimulated urban economic dynamism but also injected strong impetus into investment and business development.

On the other hand, tourism settings and consumption spaces are being used to carry cultural expression and cultural experience, advancing the concept of "highlighting culture through tourism." Grassroots events like the "Village Super League," "Village Gala," and "Village BA" (Village Basketball Association) have successfully gained widespread popularity. Under the banner of sports, culture takes center stage. Rural customs, traditional rhythms, and intangible cultural heritage permeate the hearts of the people, attracting visitors from all quarters. "Culture + countryside" model has helped villagers enrich both their pockets and their minds, forging a new track for rural revitalization.

In 2025, China's domestic tourism saw 6.522 billion trips, a year-on-year increase of 16.2%. Domestic tourism expenditure reached RMB 6.3 trillion, up 9.5% year-on-year.<sup>①</sup> Meanwhile, annual inbound tourist arrivals exceeded 150 million, a year-on-year increase of over 17%, with spending surpassing USD 130 bil-

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<sup>①</sup>"Data on Domestic Resident Travel in 2025," Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China, January 26, 2026. Full text at [https://zwgk.mct.gov.cn/zfxxgkml/tjxx/202601/t20260126\\_964367.html](https://zwgk.mct.gov.cn/zfxxgkml/tjxx/202601/t20260126_964367.html).

lion.<sup>①</sup> The development of trade in tourism services continues to maintain a positive upward trend.

## **2. Unleashing Consumption Vitality with Culture**

Culture serves not only as spiritual nourishment that cultivates the soul but also as a profound driving force supporting high-quality development. A rich and high-quality supply of cultural products meets the people's aspirations for a better life, continuously unleashing the vitality of the cultural consumption market and solidifying the foundation for the flourishing cultural industry. Through creative transformation and innovative development, fine traditional Chinese culture has taken on a new brilliance, infusing modern life with profound cultural and humanistic legacies and gathering deep-rooted and lasting spiritual forces for social and economic progress.

### **2.1 Boosting consumption momentum through high-quality cultural supply**

Quality cultural products are essential carriers through which culture empowers high-quality development. The improved quality and efficiency of artistic creation, the burst of vitality from public participation, and the growing international influence of Chinese culture have injected a lasting and powerful cultural momentum into social and economic development.

The melodious youth version of *The Peony Pavilion* (The Highlights Edition) allows the ancient charm of Kunqu Opera to shine anew after centuries. TV dramas like *Minning Town* and *A Lifelong Journey* reflect the era through a realistic lens and resonate with the entire nation. The cultural products of the Palace Museum and Dunhuang integrate heritage into daily life. Black

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<sup>①</sup>"Minister of Culture and Tourism: China's Inbound Tourist Arrivals Exceeded 150 Million in 2025," *Xinhua News Agency*, March 7, 2026.

Myth: Wukong and Nezha: The Demon Child Churns the Sea use digital innovation to bring Chinese stories to life.

These high-quality cultural masterpieces, possessing both intellectual depth and artistic warmth, vividly interpret the philosophy that "the people need art, and art needs the people even more."<sup>①</sup> Furthermore, they activate diverse consumption potential through varied and high-quality supply, driving cultural consumption toward a multi-layered, wide-reaching, and sustainable boom.

New technologies are profoundly reshaping the creation and dissemination of cultural products. New formats such as AIGC (Artificial Intelligence Generated Content) and digital immersive experiences are emerging rapidly, leading to the prosperity of new "mass literature and art" in the internet age.

"Second Sister of Yimeng" Lyu Yuxia uses simple verses to recount pastoral scenery and hopes for life from a farmer's perspective. "Auntie Field Mouse" Pei Aimin records the seasonal cycles of rural life through diaries and crayon drawings, allowing local stories to reach a wider audience.

Ordinary citizens have transformed from passive cultural audiences into active creators. The pulse of real life and genuine human emotions has become the most vivid source of inspiration. This dynamic pattern of universal participation and sharing ensures that literature and art are down-to-earth and close to the people.

Chinese culture is setting sail for international waters, promoting exchange and mutual learning among civilizations. The "New Three" cultural exports-online literature, online film and TV, and online games-have become global hits thanks to their distinct Chi-

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<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping. "Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the 10th National Congress of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and the 9th National Congress of the China Writers Association," Xinhua News Agency, November 30, 2016.

nese style, profound cultural core, and innovative international expression.

The TV series *Zanghai Zhuan* has become a global hit, while the English version of the online novel *Shangyuan Huan* has been published and released overseas, and the global downloads of short drama apps continue to grow.<sup>①</sup>In 2025, the number of active users of Chinese online literature in overseas markets reached nearly 200 million, covering more than 200 countries and regions. The cultural charm originating from the East is translating into extensive influence across the world.<sup>②</sup>

## 2.2 Constructing multi-dimensional spaces for cultural consumption

The vitality of cultural consumption is unleashed within specific settings and elevated through immersive experiences. By breaking down traditional consumption boundaries, new consumption scenarios-immersive, interactive, and convenience-oriented-are constantly emerging, enabling culture to be experienced, purchased, and disseminated.

Inside "The Longest Day in Chang'an" themed block in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, floral displays and the "Twelve Flower Deities" recreate the spring scenery of the Tang Dynasty. Traditional performances like the *Rainbow and Feather Dress Dance* and the *Whirling Dance* play in rotation, while tourists in Hanfu (traditional clothing) interact and play chess with non-player characters (NPCs), feeling as if they have traveled back a thousand years. This panoramic, immersive consumption scenario transforms traditional culture from a "static exhibit" into a "liv-

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① "Xinhua All-Media Headline | Forging Great Strength for Rejuvenation and Composing a Splendid Chapter of the Times: New Progress Made in Ideological and Cultural Work in 2025," Xinhua News Agency, January 4, 2026.

② "Xinhua News Brief | Accelerating Industrialization: Market Size of IP Adaptation of Online Literature Exceeds 360 Billion Yuan," Xinhua News Agency, April 13, 2026.

ing experience," driving sustained growth in catering, shopping, and accommodation.

Cultural consumption spaces are breaking physical boundaries and expanding across all territories—from urban business districts to rural villages.

In Shanghai, the "New Dimension NEWS" cultural and creative experience store integrates IPs like Dunhuang culture and popular domestic animations into interactive settings. Using smart devices as a link, it upgrades commercial spaces into cross-temporal cultural arenas, broadening the scope of urban cultural consumption.

In Chengdu, Sichuan, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Lantern Festival has moved beyond the limits of traditional venues. Utilizing nearly 100,000 square meters of outdoor space, it merges a sea of brilliant lanterns with traditional skills like "Strike Iron Flowers" and Sichuan Opera face-changing. Through dynamic light-and-shadow scenes like the "Insects Chirping Forest," it creates a natural immersive experience, turning the countryside into a new landmark for nighttime cultural consumption, thereby driving the expansion of cultural consumption spaces across both urban and rural areas.

Technology empowerment, cross-industry integration, and upgraded experiences are accelerating the iteration of China's new cultural consumption scenarios and business models. These include tech-driven formats like VR/AR immersive exhibitions, digital museums, and AI-customized creative cultural products, as well as multi-sector integration involving business, tourism, culture, sports, and wellness.

A major growth engine is the performance economy. By linking the "ticket-stub economy" with commercial districts, events such as concerts, theatrical performances, and e-sports tourna-

ments extend from simple viewing into full-chain consumption experiences. When combined with online streaming and cloud exhibitions, a diverse ecosystem is formed that covers immersive experience, local consumption, and wide-reaching dissemination.

These new consumption scenarios-rich in cultural heritage, artistic warmth, and innovative vitality-serve as the golden key to upgrading market efficiency through humanistic value. In 2025, China's cultural and related industrial enterprises above a designated size achieved an operating income of RMB 15.2135 trillion, a year-on-year increase of 7.4%.<sup>①</sup>

### **2.3 Transforming resource advantages through "creative transformation and innovative development"**

Across China, regions are leveraging the deep roots of fine traditional Chinese culture, using modern concepts to revitalize traditions and technological means to empower heritage. By promoting creative transformation and innovative development (the "Two Creations"), they are enabling ancient cultural lineages to resonate with modern life, effectively converting cultural resource advantages into industrial development momentum.

From the Tiangong Caisson Ceiling refrigerator magnets from the Beijing Ancient Architecture Museum to panda-themed cultural and creative products intangible cultural heritage Shu brocade from Kuanzhai Alley in Chengdu, Sichuan, and the "RO-MOMO" plushies in Xi'an designed after the local roujiamo (meat burger)-locally inspired creative cultural products have become trendy "must-buy" souvenirs for international tourists.

At the Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang, researchers are exploring new paths for the "digital return" of dispersed relics, using

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<sup>①</sup> "Statistical Communiqué of the People's Republic of China on the 2025 National Economic and Social Development," National Bureau of Statistics, February 28, 2026. Full text at [https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/zxfb/202602/t20260228\\_1962662.html](https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/zxfb/202602/t20260228_1962662.html)



3D printing to restore and display fragmented statues, allowing "heads and bodies to be reunited" in their original glory. Meanwhile, at the Malanshan Cultural Digital Innovation Center in Changsha, Hunan, fine digital sampling of the Wuxi Tablet Forest cliff inscriptions has restored blurred texts to clarity. Utilizing holographic projections and VR, the center has created an immersive digital museum where visitors can engage in a "cross-temporal dialogue" with ancient masters of calligraphy, making cultural heritage tangible, accessible, and integrated into daily consumption.

Lazare Eloundou Assomo, Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Center, stated that these innovative practices demonstrate how China is setting new standards for the integration of technological progress and cultural preservation. He noted that China is providing valuable experience for the global protection and inheritance of world heritage, contributing "Chinese wisdom" to global cultural development.

Vivid examples of creative transformation and innovative development show that traditional culture remains vital only when it evolves with the times. By adhering to the principle of "developing through protection and protecting through development," China is closely integrating its fine traditional culture with modern industry and everyday life, thereby safeguarding a millennial cultural lineage while expanding the cultural industry and boosting market consumption.

### **3. Nourishing Good Social Governance with Culture**

Taking culture as the backbone to consolidate the foundation of good governance gives full expression to the profound strength of culture in deepening the ethical and cultural civilization of urban and rural areas and strengthening primary-level governance.

From improving public cultural services and fortifying the foundations for ethical and cultural civilization, to enhancing the civic virtue of the whole people and fostering an ethos of striving for excellence and kindness, and further to integrating cultural strengths deeply into governance practices, urban-rural civilization, and primary-level governance resonate and progress in tandem. A grand scroll of good governance featuring joint governance, shared benefits, harmony and virtue, and tangible gains for the people is now unfolding across China.

### **3.1 Strengthening urban-rural cultural venues**

The integrated development of urban and rural public cultural services hinges on the joint construction of facilities, shared use of resources, and effective alignment between supply and demand. Committed to a people-centered approach, regions across China have improved the urban-rural public cultural service system, strengthened community-level cultural venues, and guided high-quality cultural resources to extend to communities and rural areas, ensuring that cultural services penetrate the urban-rural fabric like a network of capillaries.

One vivid example is Chengdu's "Market Book Nooks" in the Beilei community. Each afternoon after school the space comes alive: Children gather here to read picture books and do handicrafts, while parents who come to pick them up linger to read and chat. To address the lack of after-school study and reading space for children of market vendors, Chengdu has built "Market Book Nooks" in more than 300 markets since 2023. These venues, infused with both "the vitality of street life" and "the aroma of books," have enabled residents to move from being mere users of public space to becoming cultural participants, co-creators, and contributors.

From the targeted supply of the "Market Book Nooks" that

supports after-school care and reading for vendors' children, to the diverse services of township cultural halls integrating agricultural training and intangible cultural heritage inheritance transmission, and to the user-friendly measures of urban reading rooms including "staggered opening hours" and "digital lending," local authorities across China have accelerated the development of a unified, equitably distributed, convenient, and practical urban-rural public cultural service system to meet public cultural demands, and continuously strengthened community-level cultural service venues.

China's public cultural service system has been steadily improved, with rising standardization and equalization. By the end of 2025, there were 3,253 public libraries nationwide with 1.46983 billion visits, and 3,517 cultural centers.<sup>①</sup> More than 40,000 new-type public cultural spaces near residential communities have been woven into people's daily lives—small and compact, well-designed and flexible—meeting diverse cultural demands.

While standardized facilities consolidate the service foundation, innovative approaches are breaking spatial boundaries and restructuring service models, making public cultural spaces both down-to-earth and creative.

In Yangzhou, Jiangsu, smart operations have created a "15-minute reading circle" featuring riverside "breathing reading rooms" and rural "haystack reading rooms."

In Xiamen, Fujian Province, a 200-year-old ancestral house in Qian'an Village has been transformed into a multifunctional cultural space for reading, childcare, and elder care. In Kunming, Yunnan, over 650 enterprises have collaborated to repurpose in-

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<sup>①</sup>National Statistical Communique of the People's Republic of China on National Economic and Social Development 2025, National Bureau of Statistics, February 28, 2026. Full text at [https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/zxfb/202602/t20260228\\_1962662.html](https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/zxfb/202602/t20260228_1962662.html).

dustrial heritage into diverse cultural experiences that lead new trends in cultural consumption. These spaces have reshaped the public service ecosystem with new layouts, concepts, and business forms.

### 3.2 Optimizing cultural service provision

Local authorities across China continue to advance ethical and cultural civilization by cultivating and educating people with culture, focusing on improving the quality and increasing the quantity and variety of fine cultural products, ensuring that excellent literary and artistic works and high-quality cultural services are delivered directly to communities—nourishing the hearts of the people and amplifying positive energy and the mainstream cultural narrative.

In the warm afternoon sun on the stage of Fandang Village in Lianshui, Huai'an, Jiangsu, villagers gather to watch a short play titled *Fandang: A Village Full of Drama*, applauding throughout the performance. "This piece was tailor-made for Fandang Village, using language and scenes familiar to local residents to bring village life onto the stage," said Cui Anqiang, a first-rank composer with the Jiangsu Provincial Performing Arts Group and an artist-in-residence. "When artists live and create in the village, they help the community discover its own cultural voice."

From community dramas that pass on moral virtues, to reading activities that promote civilized habits; from character-building cultural products for young people, to public-service cultural activities serving both urban and rural residents, various innovative carriers of cultural and ethical practice continue to emerge, reaching ever wider audiences.

Initiatives such as Yuyao's "Art for All" micro-performances explore new ways to serve the daily cultural life of the residents. Guiyang in Guizhou stages roadside concerts featuring "zero tick-

et, zero commerce, zero distance" to weave the arts into the city's character. These activities expose people to moral norms and civilized ideals through participation and experience.

These down-to-earth, warm, and popular cultural activities have not only enriched people's cultural lives but also turned the new trend of civilization from slogans on walls and papers into daily practice. Amidst laughter and joy, people feel the power of virtue; through immersive experiences, they embrace mainstream values; and through broad participation, they strengthen their sense of spiritual belonging. As civic literacy improves through subtle, everyday influence, neighborhood bonds grow more harmonious through cultural enrichment. A social atmosphere of striving for excellence and kindness continues to flourish, ensuring that the development of ethical and cultural civilization takes root in the community.

The rich soil of culture nurtures the blooms of civilization. The exemplary influence of role models such as "Moral Models," "Good Samaritans of China," and "Most Beautiful Figures" has become increasingly profound. As "Civilized Cities," "Civilized Villages," "Civilized Organizations," "Civilized Families," and "Civilized Campuses" continue to emerge, a stronger nationwide ethos of esteeming virtue, performing good deeds and emulating virtuous people has taken hold. Across China, civic morality and social refinement have ascended to a new height.

### **3.3 Deepening flexible governance at the community level**

Culture serves as the "flexible engine" of community-level governance. By drawing wisdom from fine traditional cultural heritage, regions across China are transforming cultural strength into governance efficiency, ensuring that the principles of collaborative construction, co-governance, and shared benefits take deep root in local communities.

Culture strengthens cohesion to build a beautiful home together. On weekend mornings, the Rainbow Runway along the romantic coastal belt in Xiamen, Fujian Province buzzes with activity as parent-child running events organized by the community begin on schedule. Laughter and footsteps of families blend harmoniously with the sea breeze. Once a newly built community where neighbors rarely interacted, it has now taken cultural and sports activities as a bond and civic practice as a vehicle, uniting scattered individuals into a mutual-aid governance unit. The warmth of the neighborhood has become the most solid foundation and emotional bond for primary-level governance.

Culture pools strength to address community-level challenges. In Fengxin, Jiangxi, over 290 couriers and food delivery riders have formed the "Flag-Bearer Pioneer" volunteer service team. Through a "snap and report" mini-program, they flag urban "micro-issues" such as broken utility hole covers or fire hazards-resolving over 300 risks to date. Some riders have even paired up with elderly residents living alone, acting as "mobile probes" and "ambassadors of warmth" for the community. Guided by the cultural values of friendship and mutual aid, these small actions are leveraging significant governance breakthroughs to safeguard public safety.

Culture boosts governance to enable shared benefits. The ancient wisdom of "harmony between humanity and nature" has merged with the modern philosophy of "harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature," providing rich nourishment and practical paths for sound primary-level governance. In Sanjiangyu-an National Park in Qinghai, ecological rangers protect the "Water Tower of China," ensuring that all ethnic groups enjoy clean water and ecological well-being. At Saihanba, Chengde, Hebei, three generations of foresters have created a vast sea of trees, al-

lowing local residents to enjoy a livable environment while increasing their income through eco-tourism. In Yucun, Anji, Zhejiang, the village transitioned from "selling stones" to "selling scenery," allowing the entire community to share the rewards of ecological prosperity.

Culture is like water, nourishing all things silently. Good governance is like a root, providing stability and longevity. From neighborhood watch programs to diverse co-governance, and from cultural enrichment to ecological sharing, culture remains the deepest spiritual nourishment and the most enduring value support for community-level governance-providing inexhaustible momentum for the modernization of social governance.

#### **4. Mobilizing the Driving Forces of Development with Culture**

Culture is the internal logic and deep-seated code that enables economic and social activities to occur, operate, and endure. From the ancient marketplace ethic of "treating all customers fairly, young and old alike" to the modern business commitment to "contracts of good faith," and from the artisan's relentless pursuit of perfection to a corporation's responsibility to "balance justice and interests," economic activity has never been a cold game of numbers. Rather, it is human practice, an expression of values, and the unfolding of culture. As context, instrument, and values orientation, culture makes economic activity more orderly, more effective, and imbues it with a spiritual core, generating powerful momentum for the country's high-quality development.

##### **4.1 Culture makes economic activities more orderly.**

By cultivating an environment and soil of social trust through integrity and order, culture enables economic and social activities to become "more orderly."

From the everyday essentials to the refined arts, a glance through the roster of "China Time-Honored Brands" reveals familiar names such as Quanjude, Tongrentang, and Lao Feng Xiang. These brands, with products, craftsmanship, and services passed down through generations, embody a distinctly Chinese cultural background and profound cultural heritage. Standing firm amid the tides of China's market economy, they exemplify enduring philosophies of business and development that remain vibrant and relevant today.

In Weifang, Shandong Province, the ninety-year-old "Cuizi" brand stone-ground sesame oil workshop has upheld a tradition of integrity, growing into a leading enterprise with annual sales exceeding 600 million yuan and exporting sesame-oil products to more than 30 countries and regions, including the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. Lao Feng Xiang in Shanghai, founded in 1848, has adapted to market laws through continuous reform and innovation. It remains the leading brand in China's gold and jewelry sector and has repeatedly ranked among the "Luxury & Premium 50."

"A gentleman desires wealth but acquires it through proper means," and "Balance justice and interests, putting justice first"-these philosophies from China's fine traditional culture have shaped the regulatory ethos of China's modern market economy. They imperceptibly guide market actors to correctly handle the relationship between justice and interests, serving as the foundation for enterprises to consciously consolidate trust and order.

Merchants on Zhejiang's "Demonstration Streets for Integrity Operations" voluntarily display their credit ratings and accept public supervision. Beijing's Liubiju upholds its ancestral motto of "genuine goods at fair prices, no deception," enforcing strict process control and full-chain quality traceability. Numerous



e-commerce platforms have strengthened their credit evaluation systems, encouraging merchants to honor commitments and operate with integrity. In 2025, China issued the Guidelines to Improve the Social Credit System, emphasizing its deep integration with all aspects and links of economic and social development. China's value that "promises must be kept and actions must be resolute" is deeply intertwined with the order of the modern market economy. It sets clear rules for the unified national market, cultivates a solid foundation of trust for high-quality development, and forges a new development path in which traditional ethics are modernized, and credit culture gains institutional support.

#### **4.2 Culture renders economic operations more effective.**

Culture functions as a vital instrument for economic and social activity, enhancing the effectiveness of economic operations.

On one hand, culture has profoundly shaped China's regional economic landscape. Distinct historical and cultural lineages have nurtured distinct economic forms finely tuned to their environments, endowing them with efficient development models tailored to their local conditions. This has become the underlying logic for regional economic transformation and upgrading.

From the Qin and Han dynasties through the Song dynasty, successive waves of migration and the blending of northern and southern cultures laid the groundwork for today's southeast coastal development. Through values such as balancing agriculture and commerce, passing on the tradition of farming and reading, seizing opportunities courageously, and seeking strength through the sea, culture has become the "operating system" driving local economic growth. As a result, coastal provinces like Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong contribute more than one-third of China's GDP while occupying less than one-tenth of its land area.

"The boundless plain fringed with stars hanging low; The moon surges with the great river's flow." Historic imagery penned by Du Fu over a millennium ago now finds new expression in the Three Gorges Reservoir region. The Yangtze River Economic Belt is emerging as a primary arena for ecological priority and green development, a major conduit for domestic and international circulation, and a leading engine of high-quality development. Open and inclusive, and guided by the Belt and Road Initiative, ancient trade corridors linking Asia, Africa, and Europe are being revitalized, and provinces and hub cities along these routes are forging distinctive paths for an open economy through cross-cultural integration.

On the other hand, culture profoundly influences the formulation of China's economic policies, guiding the direction of reform and governance.

From poverty alleviation to rural revitalization, from the large-scale development of the western regions to the revitalization of old industrial bases in the Northeast and the rise of Central China, and from pairing assistance to deepening East-West collaboration, contemporary Chinese macroeconomic governance integrates the classical philosophy of "governing the world for the benefit of the people" into high-quality development goals. By adhering to the people-centered development philosophy, China ensures that the fruits of economic growth benefit all the people, continuously promoting common prosperity.

Meanwhile, it is essential to delineate the proper boundaries of government functions and refine the mechanisms for market-based resource allocation. Drawing on traditional Chinese ideas such as the "Theory of Weight and Light," the "Theory of Good Causes," and the "Theory of Harmony and Cooperation," we can better integrate an efficient market with a well-function-

ing government, and strive to build an economic system with effective market mechanisms, dynamic micro-entities, and sound macro-regulation.<sup>①</sup>

### **4.3 Culture imbues economic and social development with a spiritual core.**

As a core value, culture imbues economic and social development with a spiritual core.

At the foot of the Great Wall and by Yanqi Lake, Huairou District in Beijing is leveraging its cultural resources and historical heritage to foster a humanistic environment and stimulate cultural momentum. This outer suburb of Beijing, once uniquely defined by its "lucid waters and lush mountains," has now transformed into one of the regions with the highest concentration of major scientific and technological infrastructure in China. The Shenzhen Special Economic Zone has achieved more than 1,000 "firsts" in China, accomplishing a historic leap from a small border town to an international metropolis with global influence. Behind the "Shenzhen Miracle" lies the indispensable value guidance of the "enterprising, pioneering and persevering spirit."

"Broaden the mind to accommodate all things; humble the heart to embrace all goodness." China's economic and social development is consistently anchored in the value coordinate that "the world belongs to all." From the rural revitalization practices of integrated rice-fish farming and dryland terraces to the technologically empowered, inclusive, and convenient urban public services; from the ecological philosophy of "taking from nature with moderation and using resources with restraint," to the governance strategy of "enriching the people to strengthen the nation"-the Chinese people are sharing vivid stories of development with

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<sup>①</sup>Zhou Wen & Li Jiliang. "Cultural Inheritance and Innovation, National Governance, and Improving the Macroeconomic Governance System," *Economic Perspectives*, 2026 (1).

the world through a cultural lens.

More importantly, cultural values endow the Chinese people with the confidence and resolve to pursue development. Cultural confidence is the most fundamental, profound, and enduring driving force for development. This strength enables the Chinese people to shape fulfilling lives through dedication, selfless commitment, and hard work. By remaining modest, prudent, and steadfast, we will ultimately overcome every risk and challenge along the way. Seizing opportunities and keeping pace with the times, the nation as a whole is unleashing a powerful surge of innovation and creativity. Remaining poised and adept, and with the firm resolve of long-termism, we will accomplish tasks that are difficult yet unequivocally right.

## **Chapter III: The Methodology of Empowering Economic and Social Development with Culture**

Empowering economic and social development with culture embodies a scientific methodology. Upholding value guidance, putting people first, upholding fundamental principles and breaking new ground, and applying systems thinking are not only important guidelines for the practice of empowering economic and social development with culture, but they also provide a guide to action for continuously promoting the deep integration and synergistic advancement of culture and economic development.

### **1. Upholding Value Guidance**

Value guidance anchors the course for empowering economic and social development with culture. It ensures that economic and social development always advances firmly in the right direction, clearing away the murky and bringing in the clear, forging consensus and pooling strength, and achieving steady and sustained progress. Under the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Culture, the values and concepts carried by advanced socialist culture, revolutionary culture, and fine traditional Chinese culture run through the entire process of empowering economic and social development with culture, continuously playing a positive value-guiding role in production and daily life.

Only by upholding value guidance can we prevent phenomena such as cultural and tourism projects blindly chasing popularity while neglecting spiritual guidance, or enterprises solely pursuing short-term profits while ignoring social responsibilities, thus avoiding the pitfall of utilitarianism. Only by upholding value guidance can we prevent cultural products from excessively play-

ing up vulgar tastes, or cultural services from becoming overly entertaining and superficial, thus avoiding the pitfall of pandering to vulgarity. Only by upholding value guidance can we prevent "putting on a show" rather than doing real work, thus avoiding the pitfall of formalism characterized by a penchant for image-building projects.

To purify the source and strengthen the foundation, upholding value guidance requires us to prioritize social benefits and ensure a balance between social and economic returns. We must ensure that cultural empowerment always serves the well-rounded development of individuals and the all-around progress of society. We must resolutely discard the utilitarian tendency to one-sidedly pursue economic interests and overly rely on web traffic effects, ensuring that cultural development and economic and social development move in the same direction and reinforce each other.

Upholding value guidance requires us to strengthen the educational, aesthetic, and cohesive functions of culture. We must elevate the ideological depth and spiritual taste of cultural products, and improve the level of cultural-ethical advancement in urban and rural areas, as well as primary-level governance. We must consciously resist tendencies toward vulgarity, excessive entertainment, and pandering to popularity, turning cultural empowerment into an important pillar for fostering upright social conduct, leading the trend of the times, and forging social consensus.

Upholding value guidance requires us to establish and apply a correct understanding of what it means to perform well. We must proceed from reality, act in accordance with objective laws, and balance the long-term with the short-term, and the whole with the part. We must promote the deep integration of culture with the economy and science and technology, cultivate new quality productive forces, and forge a distinctive, dynamic, and sus-

tainable path for empowering economic and social development with culture.

## 2. Putting People First

Putting people first is the fundamental starting point and ultimate goal of empowering economic and social development with culture. The Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China states: "We must protect the people's fundamental interests, improve their wellbeing, and work tirelessly to ensure that development is for the people and by the people and that its fruits are shared by the people. We must do a better job of seeing that the gains of modernization benefit all our people fairly."<sup>①</sup>

Development for the people means always focusing on meeting the people's needs for a better life, allowing cultural empowerment to drive industrial upgrading, urban and rural construction, social governance, and the improvement of people's livelihoods. Development by the people means respecting the principal position of the people in economic construction, social development, and cultural creation, and fully stimulating their enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity. Development fruits shared by the people means promoting the fair and equitable distribution of cultural resources, cultural services, and fruits of economic and social development, ensuring that the results of cultural empowerment are tangible and perceptible to the people.

Only by putting people first can we prevent ignoring the real expectations and practical needs of the people, thus avoiding the pitfall of "prioritizing form over substance." Only by putting

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<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping. "Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects—Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China," *Qiushi Journal*, 2022 (21).

people first can we prevent literary and art creators from retreating into "coterie culture" or obsessing over "self-indulgent" creation that is detached from the actual feelings of the people, thus avoiding the mistake of "prioritizing supply over feedback." Only by putting people first can we prevent cultural venues from appearing to be public resources for the people while in reality failing to serve them or provide universal access, thus avoiding the tendency of "prioritizing construction over sharing."

Putting people first requires returning development goals to the enhancement of human wellbeing and well-rounded development. We must ensure that economic activities serve the needs for a better life, use public satisfaction as the yardstick for measuring the effectiveness of development, and promote the resonance between cultural empowerment and the improvement of people's livelihoods.

Putting people first requires recognizing the importance of enriching people's spiritual world. We must respect the people's principal position, activate the cultural innovation and creativity of the entire nation, and encourage the people to participate in cultural inheritance, artistic creation, and cultural communication, ensuring that the people truly become participants in cultural empowerment.

Putting people first means ensuring that cultural empowerment delivers not only development speed, but also the warmth of people's livelihoods and the depth of humanistic care. We must extend public cultural resources to the primary level and enhance the quality of cultural services. By promoting the deep integration of culture and the economy, we can cultivate more new cultural business models and scenarios that are close to people's lives, allowing culture to integrate into daily routines and nourish people's lives.



### 3. Upholding Fundamental Principles and Breaking New Ground

Upholding fundamental principles and breaking new ground is an important ideological method for the Communist Party of China's governance in the new era, as well as a practical guideline for empowering economic and social development with culture. Upholding fundamental principles means adhering to the truth and the right path; breaking new ground means being courageous in exploration and opening up new realms. The two complement each other, embodying the dialectical unity of "constancy" and "change," inheritance and development, and principles and creativity.

President Xi Jinping pointed out: "Only by upholding fundamental principles can we avoid losing our bearings or making catastrophic mistakes. Only by breaking new ground can we meet the call of the day and shape the trends of our times."<sup>①</sup> Within the theory and practice of empowering economic and social development with culture, upholding fundamental principles serves as the direction, stance, and bottom line. Deviating from this principle would cause cultural empowerment to lose its spiritual core and foundation. At best, it leads to the alienation of cultural empowerment into pure commercial hype and economic profit-seeking; at worst, it drives economic and social spheres into intellectual colonization, cultural dependency, and cultural nihilism, causing cultural empowerment to veer off course and go astray. Breaking new ground is the source of momentum for cultural empowerment. Deviating from the principle of innovation would leave

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<sup>①</sup> Xi Jinping. "Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects—Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China," *Qiushi Journal*, 2022 (21).

cultural empowerment trapped within existing resources and fixed paths, unable to provide an inexhaustible impetus and long-term support for Chinese modernization.

In fact, empowering economic and social development with culture advocated by China is itself a crystallization of upholding fundamental principles while breaking new ground. In some traditional Western economic theories, culture is often "absent"; its role in development is overlooked, and traditional culture is even one-sidedly viewed as an obstacle to progress. Conversely, empowering economic and social development with culture inherits the essence of past development theories while innovatively activating the empowering role of culture across all sectors, making culture a core element and vital support for driving development.

Only by upholding fundamental principles can we ensure that cultural empowerment always serves Chinese modernization, the people, and common prosperity, thereby promoting social fairness and justice and enhancing people's wellbeing. Only by upholding fundamental principles can we maintain our national cultural subjectivity, avoiding the loss of our roots during opening up and development, and preventing fine traditional culture from being dissolved by foreign values. Only by upholding fundamental principles can we safeguard national ideological security and maintain social stability.

Only by breaking new ground can we deepen our understanding of the laws governing cultural empowerment for economic and social development; further improve cultural industry policies, activate cultural momentum, and transform static cultural resources into dynamic development, industrial, and livelihood resources. Only by breaking new ground can we promote the continuous resonance between cultural values and economic and social development values, providing a lasting and profound spiritu-

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al strength and development impetus for Chinese modernization.

#### **4. Applying Systems Thinking**

"He who fails to plan for the whole situation is incapable of planning for a single area." Applying systems thinking is a vital methodology for empowering economic and social development with culture. Its core lies in observing things through the lens of universal connection, a comprehensive and systemic perspective, and evolutionary change. It involves properly handling various relationships, coordinating the interests of all parties, and mobilizing the enthusiasm of all stakeholders. Through systemic planning and coordinated advancement, it ensures the continuous development of all undertakings.

Economic and social development covers a wide and all-encompassing range of fields; thus, cultural empowerment for such development is inevitably a complex systemic project. The empowering role of culture is not a simple addition of single-point efforts or localized effects, but a holistic shaping through deep integration and synergistic interaction across all sectors. Without systems thinking, cultural empowerment would fall into the trap of fragmented and isolated advancement, making it difficult to achieve the organic connection between fields and the synergistic enhancement of all factors, ultimately leading to a decline in empowering efficiency and the dissolution of overall value.

Applying systems thinking requires making overall plans and taking all factors into consideration. Cultural empowerment spans multiple fields-including politics, economy, society, and ecological civilization-and involves various stakeholders such as the government, social organizations, enterprises, and the public, as well as multiple elements like resources, technology, and talent. Therefore, we must maintain a holistic perspective and coordinate the inter-

ests and demands of all parties. We must strive to break down departmental barriers, regional fragmentation, and industry boundaries to promote the integration of resources, convergence of forces, and alignment of efforts across fields, departments, regions, and entities. This will prevent issues such as resource misallocation, lack of coordination, and waste of resources.

Applying systems thinking requires integration-based empowerment. The effectiveness of empowering economic and social development with culture depends on the depth of integration between culture and other fields. When culture serves only as an external symbol or decorative element in an industry or social sector, its involvement remains at the superficial stage of "physical grafting," and its empowering effect is inevitably limited. However, when culture transforms into "Culture +", culture is no longer merely a decorative appendage. Instead, like air or water, it becomes seamlessly embedded in the fabric of other fields. This ensures that the channels for converting cultural value into commercial and social value are omnipresent and operate smoothly.

Applying systems thinking requires improving institutional guarantees. The cross-sector complexity, plurality of stakeholders, and long-term nature of value transformation in cultural empowerment dictate that institutional design and mechanical operation must serve as the underlying support. For instance, we should use laws and regulations to clarify the roles of various entities-including the government, business entities, and social organizations-to resolve the problem of fragmentation and discoordination. We must standardize the transformation of cultural value through the definition of property rights and the protection of intellectual property rights, balancing social benefits with economic returns. By improving these mechanisms, we can provide a safeguard for the high-quality development of cultural empowerment.

## Chapter IV: Global Inspirations of Empowering Economic and Social Development with Culture

In today's world, profound changes unseen in a century continue to evolve, and global development faces a multitude of challenges. Development and governance deficits are steadily mounting. "What kind of world should we build, and how should we build it?" This has become a question that humanity must answer.

Against this backdrop, the international community has been reflecting on traditional development paradigms. There is an increasing focus on the pivotal role of culture as a driving force, and a growing global consensus to lead more inclusive and resilient development through humanistic values.

Rooted in its own national conditions, China's practice of empowering social and economic development with culture remains steadfastly people-centered. By balancing the coordinated development of material civilization and ethical and cultural advancement, China has not only propelled its own high-quality growth but also contributed Chinese wisdom to the sustainable social and economic development of the world.

### **1. Overcoming Mental Dependency Through Cultural Confidence**

Cultural confidence is the prerequisite and the very foundation for culture to empower social and economic development.

Western colonizers systematically negated the cultures of developing nations, leading to what the French writer Frantz Fanon described as a state of "mental derangement" among their people, who were left constantly asking: "Who am I?"<sup>①</sup>

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<sup>①</sup>Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*, Yilin Press, 2005, p. 177.

Too often, "modernization" has been equated with "Westernization." Developing nations have unconsciously measured their own cultural values by foreign standards, leading to a blind worship or purely utilitarian use of dominant cultures. As cultural confidence eroded, many began to view their own culture as a burden, giving rise to the phenomenon of "cultural dependency." Furthermore, certain powers have long indulged in cultural hegemony, even attempting to reshape the ideology and social structure of other nations through cultural infiltration and ideological colonialism. In this climate, regressive theories like "civilization superiority" and the "clash of civilizations" resurfaced from time to time.

Eduardo Tzili-Apango, a researcher in international politics at the Metropolitan Autonomous University in Mexico, noted: "Cultural subjectivity is fundamental to recognizing who we are, where we come from, and where we are going. It is a question that concerns the very essence of a nation's existence."<sup>①</sup>

Today, both Western and developing nations are experiencing, to varying degrees, the spiritual crisis of cultural nihilism. The severance of cultural heritage, a lack of cultural identity, and a stagnation in cultural innovation have weakened cultural subjectivity, leaving the effort to empower social and economic development with culture as a tree without roots.

By integrating the basic tenets of Marxism with fine traditional Chinese culture, China has reshaped and consolidated its cultural subjectivity through upholding fundamental principles while breaking new ground. This allows an ancient civilization to preserve its cultural roots and unleash innovative vitality in the

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<sup>①</sup>"Review: *Preservation, Inheritance, and Innovation—Advancing Toward Modernization Together: International Experts Acclaim Think Tank Report Upholding Cultural Subjectivity Amid Dynamic Interplay of World Cultures*," *Xinhua News Agency*, July 19, 2025.

new era, cementing the cultural foundation for advancing Chinese modernization and national rejuvenation, and gathering an inexhaustible spiritual driving force for high-quality development.

A nation's development path can only endure when it is rooted in its own historical trajectory and cultural DNA. As Ivona Ladjevac, deputy director of the Institute of International Politics and Economics in Serbia, put it: "There is not just one path to modernization. All countries should embrace their own history, institutions, and culture, and on this basis explore an independent development path suited to their national conditions."<sup>①</sup>

Amid the dynamic interplay of global cultures, nations must root their development in their own history, culture, and resource endowments to delve into the core values and spiritual essence of their cultures. By protecting and transmitting cultural heritage, while innovating new modes of cultural expression and empowerment, traditional culture can be aligned with modern society, providing a sustainable source of momentum for social and economic development.

## **2. Driving Economic Upgrading Through Cultural Momentum**

Currently, the global economic recovery remains tortuous and sluggish. Overlapping energy and food crises have exacerbated the development deficit, posing significant challenges to shared prosperity.

In January 2026, the World Bank released its latest *Global Economic Prospects* report, noting that the period from 2020 to 2030 "is on track to be the weakest decade of global growth

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<sup>①</sup>"Global Roundtable Dialogue: To truly understand Chinese modernization, one must first better read China," *Global Times Online*, October 17, 2025. Full text at <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/40kuE8yu08m>.

since the 1960s."<sup>①</sup>

Culture is a profound driver of high-quality development. By treating culture as a core engine for economic growth, China offers valuable insights into addressing the global development deficit.

Thomas Sargent, Nobel Laureate in Economics, observed that China's "miraculous" economic growth over the past 40 years is attributable not only to economic policy but also to broader social and cultural factors. He noted that "while other countries faced similar choices, they did not achieve the same level of success."<sup>②</sup>

From the factor dimension, China integrates cultural resources directly into value creation, expanding new frontiers for economic growth while preserving cultural continuity. From the perspective of economic structure, China promotes the deep fusion of culture with the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors. By embedding the philosophy of "Tech for Good" within cultural frameworks, it extends development boundaries and fosters new business models and scenarios, achieving an organic unity of economic and cultural benefits. From the value dimension, guided by traditional concepts such as "harmony of humanity and nature," China ensures that economic growth is aligned with social progress and ecological protection. Culture remains the spiritual core of China's high-quality economic and social development.

Mladen Pleše, a Croatian expert on China studies, once remarked that for any society, economic and social progress must be linked to culture, which in turn enriches the essence of the

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① "World Bank Upgrades 2026 Global Economic Growth Forecast," Xinhua Net, January 14, 2026. Full text at <http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/20260114/37e6c8e147dc4b8eaffc2569feff2410/c.html>.

② "Thomas Sargent, Nobel Laureate in Economics: The U.S. 'Chip War' Troubles Me," Global Times, January 6, 2024. Full text at <https://3w.huanqiu.com/a/de583b/4G3VCaRU76G>.



economy.<sup>①</sup>

Facing economic headwinds, nations must keenly recognize that only by fully integrating cultural resources into the entire economic value chain can they open pathways for transforming cultural value into technological vitality and economic momentum. By reshaping the intrinsic logic of industrial and economic development, countries can unleash the "multiplier effect" of culture and economy, driving transformative shifts in global growth.

### **3. Calling for a Return to Humanity Through Humanistic Economics**

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times... we had everything before us, we had nothing before us." The "famine amidst prosperity" depicted by 19th-century British author Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities* bears a striking resemblance to the world today.

On the one hand, as the wheels of modernization roll forward, some nations are experiencing rapid social and economic development and an exponential accumulation of material wealth. On the other hand, the North-South development gap continues to widen, with roughly 1.1 billion people globally still trapped in the mire of extreme poverty. In terms of the material conditions essential for human survival, economic development has failed to deliver inclusive benefits. The reality that modernization has failed to serve the "well-being of all" is becoming increasingly evident. In many countries, economic development practices have shown a clear tendency to drift away from people-centered principles.

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<sup>①</sup>*International Review: China's Answer to the "Question of the Century"—Global Acclaim for the People-Centered Economics for a New Era, Xinhuanet, January 10, 2024. Full text at <http://www.xinhuanet.com/20240110/a8e3856838c049fa90f6dd547efd2d6c/c.html>.*

Keith Bennett, a British international relations expert, notes that during the economic development of Western countries, the widening wealth gap and the endless emergence of social problems have ultimately stalled social and economic progress. This, he argues, reflects the fundamental flaws of the capital-centered Western modernization model.<sup>①</sup>

Traditional Western economics remains at a stage where economic goals such as income, profit, and GDP are the core pursuits, excluding other factors like humanistic values and cultural development as "interfering variables."

For China, modernization is not merely about the advancement of "things"-economic growth, technological progress, and material abundance-but, more crucially, about the modernization of "people." Guided by a people-centered vision and values, China has, from the perspective of humanistic economics, transcended the narrow vision of mainstream Western economics, addressed the long-standing philosophical poverty in the field of economics, and broken the "humanistic paradox" of economic growth. Furthermore, by making culture a central lever, China has restored development to its original, people-oriented purpose and underscored the amplifying role of humanistic values in social and economic progress.

China invests not only in things, but more importantly in people. Rather than channeling resources solely into industries, projects, and capital gains, it makes systematic investments in the comprehensive development and genuine needs of its citizens. By fostering human capacity, it turns individual potential into the core driver of endogenous economic growth. At the same time,

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<sup>①</sup>"People First: The Starting Point of Chinese Modernization—No.1 in the Series of Review Articles: Civilizational Insights from China's Development Practice," Xinhua News Agency, March 14, 2025.

China invests in people's spiritual well-being, actively building an inclusive public cultural service system and expanding the supply of high-quality cultural offerings, so that the achievements of cultural development are shared by all.

China's social and economic development adheres to humanistic values as its core, guiding industrial upgrading and economic growth. It discards the purely profit-driven logic of growth, embedding cultural sentiment, livelihood needs, and social value into the entire chain of production, distribution, and consumption. This achieves a multi-dimensional, comprehensive return to humanity, ensuring that economic development always serves people's aspirations for a better life and their comprehensive development. Ultimately, it realizes the parallel advancement of economic upgrading and humanistic elevation.

China's development practice, deeply rooted in humanistic values, offers valuable references and profound insights for the global economy as it strives for higher-quality and more sustainable development.

#### **4. Preventing Social Disorder Through Cultural Identity**

In recent years, the "generalization" and "alienation" of global multiculturalism have led to "fragmented" social values and "polarized" ideologies in some countries, resulting in disorder and instability due to the absence of cultural consensus.

In certain nations, immigration and cultural identity have been weaponized as tools of partisan struggle, leaving societies mired in controversy, division, and rupture. Ethnic conflicts, sectarian disputes, and class antagonisms have intensified in some regions, plunging these areas into prolonged turbulence, disorder, and loss of control, with a pronounced crisis of cultural identity.

The United States, long self-styled as the "beacon of democracy and freedom," offers a telling example: debates over "who counts as a real American" and "where America should be heading" have grown increasingly heated, fueling a deepening cultural identity crisis. Meanwhile, with the arrival of successive "waves of immigration," Western countries such as the United Kingdom have faced frequent conflicts that have evolved into divisive "culture wars," burdening societies with serious identity anxiety.

As British intellectual historian Peter Watson observes in *The Age of Nothing: How We Have Sought to Live Since the Death of God*, "Unbelievers inhabiting the secular world today are lost; they have lost something important and vital, perhaps even the most important thing of all."<sup>①</sup> "Modern life exists in an existential vacuum; we are alienated from our instincts, and have lost our traditions."<sup>②</sup> This spiritual crisis, he concludes, stems not merely from institutional failure but rather from the consequence of shaken cultural foundations.

Culture has the power to unite, harmonize, integrate, and educate. China treats culture as a key pillar of flexible governance, embedding it throughout community-level administration to enhance social governance effectiveness. By strengthening cultural identity, China consolidates the foundations of social harmony, enabling the Chinese society to maintain unity and cohesion amid an era of dynamic interplay of diverse cultures.

"Cultural inheritance is the key to strengthening China's national cohesion and public identity. As society becomes increasingly diverse and economic globalization advances, a shared

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<sup>①</sup>Peter Watson. *The Age of Nothing: How We Have Sought to Live Since the Death of God*. Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2021, p. 6.

<sup>②</sup>Peter Watson. *The Age of Nothing: How We Have Sought to Live Since the Death of God*. Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2021, p. 425.

sense of identity has become a necessary condition for stability and unity."<sup>①</sup> Hassan Ragab, Egyptian co-director of the Confucius Institute at Suez Canal University, emphasized that China is home to 56 ethnic groups, each with its own distinctive cultural traditions. By inheriting and promoting fine traditional culture, the Chinese people can enhance their sense of national identity and social belonging, thereby fostering ethnic unity and harmonious development.

"Literature and art facilitate communication and connect souls."<sup>②</sup> Guided by shared cultural awareness and values, we can bridge the divergent interests among various social groups to forge consensus on goals of action and value orientations. This helps to alleviate social conflicts and stabilize the environment for development, offering an actionable pathway for countries worldwide to achieve flexible governance.

## **5. Bridging the Urban–Rural Development Imbalance Through Cultural Synergy**

Against the backdrop of accelerating global urbanization, the intensifying imbalance between regional and urban-rural development has become a daunting challenge for many nations. This imbalance is manifested not only in widening economic gaps but also in significant disparities in public services, infrastructure, quality of life, and mindsets.

In many parts of the world, rural areas lack development opportunities, farmers have limited access to production resources, and daily life becomes increasingly difficult to sustain. As a result,

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① "Culture Wellspring of Chinese Youth's Confidence," *China Daily*, May 31, 2024. Full text at <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202405/31/WS66590da3a31082fc043ca1d2.html>.

② Xi Jinping. "Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the 11th National Congress of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and the 10th National Congress of the China Writers Association," *Xinhua News Agency*, December 14, 2021.

large numbers of people are compelled to migrate to cities, yet often find themselves unable to secure stable livelihoods. This has led to the emergence of vast urban slums—a persistent "chronic ailment" in the current global urbanization process that cannot be ignored. Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director of UN-Habitat, stated that more than 2.8 billion people worldwide currently live in substandard housing, including over 1.1 billion in slums or informal settlements, and over 300 million who are completely homeless.<sup>①</sup>

Rafael Tuts, Director of the Global Solutions Division at UN-Habitat, emphasized that more than half of the world's population lives in cities today—a figure expected to approach 70% by 2050. Promoting integrated urban-rural development is more urgent than ever before.<sup>②</sup>

From the perspective of modernization, culture is the key variable in breaking the urban-rural dual structure. Urban and rural areas should be viewed as "an organic whole" and a "living entity," emphasizing dynamic balance and holistic coordination while leveraging the synergistic role of cultural governance.

The essence of urban-rural imbalance lies in the long-term, one-way flow of talent, capital, and information toward cities. By harnessing the powerful attraction and integrative force of culture, many regions in China have broken the "siphon effect." They have achieved a two-way flow and deep integration of cultural subjects, factor resources, and industrial spaces, building a mechanism where urban and rural cultures move toward one an-

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① "Exclusive Interview with Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director of UN-Habitat," CCTV News, July 19, 2025. Full text at [http://ysxw.cctv.cn/article.html?item\\_id=15486297024502298407](http://ysxw.cctv.cn/article.html?item_id=15486297024502298407).

② "2025 China—International Dialogue on Urban—Rural Linkages Held in Songyang, Zhejiang, China International Communications Group (CICG), November 10, 2025. Full text at [http://www.cicg.org.cn/2025-11/10/content\\_43271727.htm](http://www.cicg.org.cn/2025-11/10/content_43271727.htm).

other with complementary functions and symbiotic development, ultimately achieving shared prosperity in urban and rural areas.

China is steadfastly promoting high-quality development and striving for common prosperity for all, aiming to narrow the urban-rural development gap. Zhejiang Province, which is currently building a demonstration zone for common prosperity, is a quintessential example of coordinated urban-rural development in China. In 2025, the per capita disposable income of all residents in Zhejiang surpassed RMB 70,000 for the first time, and the income ratio between urban and rural residents further narrowed to 1.81.<sup>①</sup>

China's practice demonstrates that narrowing the urban-rural gap is not a simple relocation of resources. Rather, it is a systemic project of complementary advantages and symbiotic integration with culture as the foundation. By using culture to lead the specialized and differentiated development of urban and rural areas, and by activating local cultural genes, it is possible to achieve coordinated evolution and high-quality development across all regions, effectively solving the universal problem of global urban-rural development imbalance.

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<sup>①</sup>"Zhejiang's Per Capita Disposable Income of Rural Residents Leads All Provinces and Autonomous Regions," *Farmers' Daily*, January 23, 2026. Full text at [https://www.farmer.com.cn/2026/01/23/wap\\_991010889.html](https://www.farmer.com.cn/2026/01/23/wap_991010889.html).

## Conclusion

A country will thrive only if its culture thrives, and a nation will be strong only if its culture is strong.

As the ship of human civilization sails into the twenty-first century—a period when the world faces multiple challenges, including development deficits, governance dilemmas, and spiritual disorientation—awareness is deepening that culture is profoundly embedded in every facet of economic and social life. By creating scenarios and contexts, supplying means and values for economic and social development, culture has become a core endowment that determines the future of every nation.

Empowering economic and social development with culture is both the contemporary innovation of Marxist cultural theory by the Communist Party of China and an inevitable choice for addressing the era-defining task of achieving high-quality development.

China's practice presents a magnificent scroll of a humanistic economy unfolding across the country: from the deep integration of culture and technology that is giving rise to new business models, to the fusion of culture and tourism that is shaping distinctive poles of economic growth; from guiding economic activity with values such as integrity and the right approach to justice and interests to make development more orderly, effective, and imbue it with a spiritual core, to strengthening primary-level social governance through cultural nourishment; from protecting and passing on cultural heritage to drive the "creative transformation and innovative development" of culture, to fostering ecological culture as the foundational hue of green development...

Culture is, in essence, the cultivation of humanity. Cultural empowerment is not a simple physical addition, but a chemical reac-



tion where the cultural genes of a country and nation activate high-quality development across all sectors of society.

A series of cases amply demonstrates that culture is reshaping the internal logic of China's development in an all-around and profound way, making economic development more textured, social functioning warmer, and national governance more resilient.

As countries across the world confront shared challenges, such as insufficient momentum for global economic growth, deepening social fragmentation, and persistent urban – rural disparities, China's experience in addressing development bottlenecks through the power of culture offers valuable insights for those seeking a more inclusive, resilient, and human-centered development path.

Through cultural empowerment, the great way forward is broad and smooth.

In this era of diverse interactions, we hope that countries around the world will join China in leveraging their unique local cultural resources in ways suited to their own conditions, thereby consolidating the deep foundation and spiritual confidence for national development. Together, we can forge a path of high-quality development featuring the coordination of material and cultural-ethical advancement, resolve the challenges of our times, and open up a new realm for humanity.

## Compilation Notes

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