The year 2020 has presented us with some major challenges and lots of uncertainties. Under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, times have been hard for every one of us as individuals, every industry, every country, and the world as a whole. In such a special year in human history, the Academy for International Communication of Chinese Culture is welcoming three anniversaries that respectively mark the tenth year since the publication of the theory of “Third Pole Culture,” the tenth year since the establishment of the Academy, and the tenth year since the launch of the “Looking China Youth Film Project.”

The global situation of the pandemic is now still changing. The fact that we can get together in this tough year to have discussions on this year’s theme, “Into the World: The Subjectivity of Chinese Culture,” demonstrates the hard work and support from everyone involved over the years. It reflects the importance of thinking deeply from the perspective of civilization under the influence and tearing by the pandemic; it also reflects the superiority of the Chinese institutional system in the face of public crises.

Among different civilizations under the pandemic: conflict or dialogue?

The global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic directly exposed the fragile side of the contemporary international system. It also accelerated and magnified the competition that has been happening among countries in a full range of areas including military, economy, institutional systems, values, public opinions, etc. The pandemic has torn apart many of the concepts of modern civilization that we thought were strong and commonly practiced, created a huge obstacle to economic globalization,
and exacerbated disagreements and conflicts in various international relations, including China-US relations. Although the pandemic has increased the uncertainty of world development, and the risk of the clash of civilizations seems to be surging, the global disaster has also given us an opportunity to re-examine the existing civilizations and their order. Against a post-pandemic backdrop, we can adopt a civilization-based perspective and think about how modern civilizations may cope with their own challenges in national governance, and also the possibility for them to have global-level discussions and set out the fundamental and common rules for international cooperation and communication.

When we incorporate the Third Pole Culture into such a background and observe and think, we can still feel a force of cooperation that is based on the common emotions, reason, and desire of humankind from the theoretical and practical experiences in the past decade. We can see that in a post-pandemic era, the ultimate rule for handling country-to-country relations is that different civilizations should seek win–win cooperation through communication and dialogues.

The 2020 Looking China Youth Film Project has just ended. Due to the impact of the pandemic, the project was primarily carried out through an international long-distance filming program and a domestically-based filming program. The themes of the filming were “rural affairs, rural households, and rural people” and “post-pandemic era.” Through the two programs, we were able to have 125 young foreign filmmakers from 52 countries to complete 103 films this year. Among them, 57 foreign filmmakers participated in the long-distance program, and 68 were in the domestically-based program in 7 provinces and cities in China. Young filmmakers from China and other countries have been able to work closely and efficiently to complete the filming tasks and even deliver high-quality works, regardless of the forms of collaboration or the themes of filming. This year, we have also completed a documentary film celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Looking China Project. The film includes nine young filmmakers from nine countries and languages telling the story about the Road of China from their own perspectives. The film is now in the final editing and revision stage, and includes many scenes that truly record the Chinese people’s state of life and their hard-working spirit amid the pandemic. In a world torn apart by the pandemic, this film could be a good example for the understanding and dialogue among civilizations worldwide. The successful implementation of the Looking China Project proves that people from different countries, nations and cultural backgrounds can overcome difficulties through communication and achieve the goal of win–win cooperation. It is our hope that this fact can be recognized by the whole world!

A summary of the theory and practice on the “Third Pole Culture” in the past decade

Third Pole Culture is a tentative theoretical idea on the development of contemporary Chinese culture. It was first proposed by me and my husband Shao Wu at the Beijing Forum on Literature and Arts in 2009, and was published in 2010. Over the past decade, this idea has experienced slow yet sound development in terms of both
Inheritance and generation: contemporary thinking on the…

Over the past ten years, I myself and my followers have been exploring the theory of Third Pole Culture. We have witnessed its deeper-level development as reflected in a range of research on, for example, the core value and contemporary significance of traditional Chinese culture, the role of Chinese culture in the world in a new era, Third Pole Culture and Marxism, cultural diversity and the community with a shared future for mankind, the subjectivity of Chinese culture in world civilization, and research around “The Generation of International Influence of Contemporary Chinese Culture,” a major project of the National Social Science Fund of China in 2016 that is directed by me. At the same time, there is also a horizontal expansion of the research scope. According to the essence of the theory, a series of extended research has been carried out in the areas of film, art, animation, aesthetics, etc. Among them, the “Third Pole Film Culture” is a facet of Third Pole Culture and also an area where Third Pole Culture-related theoretical research and practice are relatively well-developed.

When working in film and television education and conducting academic research, I have always valued the unity of knowledge and action, as well as the combination of theory and practice. As early as 2010, we proposed a basic approach consisting of four steps: first, further clarify Third Pole Culture regarding its facets, its theoretical and practical significance through academic research; second, generate artistic works that fully reflect the characteristics of Third Pole Culture through original artistic creation; third, make full use of various means to create cultural symbols and actively carry out culture-related dissemination; fourth, integrate different resources and mobilize all sectors of society to get involved. For the past ten years, we have been working hard to implement these ideas. The exhibition of photos showing the ten-year achievements that you visited this morning is, to a certain extent, the “homework” the Academy has completed in the past decade. As to the “scores,” I believe you already have your judgments. We do have a lot to improve, but hopefully we can get a “pass.”

The subjectivity and diversity of culture

When we proposed the concept of Third Pole Culture, we firmly believed that it was rooted in China’s 5000-year-old civilization and tradition, and that it was also a culture that kept pace with the times. The concept advocates cultural diversity, and puts special emphasis on practicing creation with the concept of “harmony” in mind. Today, amid the global dialogues among civilizations and the related reflection triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese scholars need to better deal with the relationship of inheritance of tradition, communication with the rest of the world, and contemporary culture generation as China is also an important civilization in the global context.

The Third Pole Culture we put forward has two basic meanings. The first is to further sort out, summarize, inherit and develop the most prominent, characteristic and representative content within the Chinese culture itself. The second is to put the
Chinese culture in the context of global cultures on that basis, so that the Chinese culture can interact with and learn from other cultures to form a diverse cultural landscape. We attach great importance to the core values and national spirit contained in traditional Chinese culture. For example, traditional Chinese culture respects and safeguards the value of man, and considers man to be the most precious; it holds that righteousness is the noblest character in a gentleman; it emphasizes that individuals are morally obligated to serve the society, the country and the nation; it advocates harmony-oriented perspectives on the world, life and the universe. Third Pole Culture aims to rebuild cultural confidence. It adopts a dialectical attitude of “sublation” and inheritance towards traditional culture. In the communication between Chinese and foreign cultures, it advocates the representation of cultural subjectivity on the basis of respecting diversity, and pursues cultural transcending by understanding and learning from other cultures.

The development of the theory and practice on Third Pole Culture in the past ten years has well reflected our exploration and attempt to deal with the relationship of inheritance of tradition, communication with the rest of the world, and contemporary culture generation, which are effective methods as tested by practice. This has become a typical case of building confidence in Chinese culture, telling Chinese stories, and building a socialist culture with Chinese characteristics.

Final thoughts

Dear teachers, students and friends, the current situation of the pandemic across the globe is still developing. Although the world is still facing various uncertainties, the conflict or confrontation among different countries, nations and civilizations is not the way out for the entire human race or any specific country. It is true that the pandemic has caused us a lot and aggravated the difficulties in the communication among different civilizations, but it has also brought us the strength to reflect on human civilization and order, and a chance for different civilizations to work together and make corrections. These are the important topics and issues that the Third Pole Culture is paying attention to and the new possibilities that need to be further developed in theory and practice in the future.

Author contributions The only author.

Funding Not applicable.

Data availability Not applicable.

Code availability Not applicable.

Conflict of interest Not applicable.

Ethical statements I hereby declare that this manuscript is the result of my independent creation under the reviewer’s comments. Except for the quoted contents, this manuscript does not contain any research achievements that have been published or written by other individuals or groups. I am the only author of this manuscript. The legal responsibility of this statement shall be borne by me.