

Research on the Influence Mechanism of Irrational Factors on Cultural Consumption from the Perspective of Behavioral Economics

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Abstract

Due to the attributes of spiritual and symbolic consumer goods of cultural consumption, irrational factors such as the cultural environment, conceptual class, popular trend, and psychological state in which consumers live also have a strong influence on residents' cultural consumption decisions. In view of this, the framework of behavioral economics is applied to explore the mechanism of pressure sense and self-restraint on consumption rate and the mechanism of psychological account on the adjustment of cultural consumption at the micro level under the premise of the existence of limited rationality of consumers. In this way, it provides an important basis for proposing strategies to promote the happiness of national life and improve national quality.

Keywords

Behavioral Economics Perspective, Factors, Mechanisms, Influence, Cultural Consumption, Irrationality

1. Introduction

Cultural consumption is a higher level of consumption demand derived spiritually after residents' own material needs have been basically satisfied. Under the macro background of China's consumption upgrading, cultural consumption has gradually become an important part of residents' consumption. In the past decade, China's cultural industry has made great progress in economic reform and development, and government support for the development of the cultural industry has gradually increased from the central to local levels. What are the influencing factors of residents' cultural consumption? Are there special influen-

cing factors behind the influencing factors of consumption in the framework of traditional economics (SGretzel, 2021)? The study of these issues is of great significance to the development of cultural consumption and thus improves the consumption structure, consumption upgrade and quality of life of the residents in China. Cultural consumption is different from other consumption from the practical point of view of consumption, and its main function lies in the enjoyment at the spiritual level, which is another kind of consumption that is detached from the consumption of daily necessities and durable goods, and different from the consumption of material luxuries (Buhalis, 2023). Before consumption, there is no expectation of the utility that can be obtained after consumption, and this uncertainty has largely shaken the “expectation” option in the assumption of rational man rooted in traditional consumption. Therefore, in the purchase decision of non-essential consumer goods such as cultural consumption, the traditional rational man assumption fails and the influence of irrational factors plays a dominant role. Therefore, the study of cultural consumption decision-making from the perspective of behavioral economics is more persuasive and has stronger explanatory power to the real problems than the conclusions drawn under the framework of traditional economics consumption influencing factors. Cultural consumption is a special kind of consumption; different from the consumption logic of daily household goods and the purchase of durable goods, cultural consumption is a higher level of demand derived spiritually after residents’ own material needs are basically satisfied. Unlike traditional consumer goods, which are determined by objective environmental factors such as consumers’ income, education level and personal property status, cultural consumption is also affected by a large number of subjective factors such as consumers’ cultural environment, conceptual hierarchy, fashion trends and psychological state, so cultural consumption is much more irrational compared with general consumption. In the domestic research related to the cultural industry, most of the existing literature on China’s cultural consumption is only single-angle, macro, qualitative analysis, while multi-perspective, micro, quantitative analysis is very little. In view of this, this paper tries to start from the perspectives of psychology, sociology, behavioral economics, traditional microeconomics, macroeconomics and other disciplines in the process of writing, and adopts the method of combining normative research and empirical analysis to conduct a multi-dimensional research on China’s residents’ cultural consumption in an attempt to expand the depth of research on China’s cultural consumption and to make up for the shortcomings of the current research on the cultural industry.

2. An Analysis of Rational and Irrational Factors in Consumer Decision Making in Behavioral Economics

2.1. Analysis of Rational Factors of Consumer Decision Making in Behavioral Economics

The traditional economic theory of consumption starts from the study of various

types of income hypotheses, develops the single income affecting consumption to the combination of various types of income, and combines the consumer utility, expectation theory and uncertainty theory to study the consumption, saving and investment decision-making. In this paper, in the empirical research and variable selection, we draw on the rational consumption influencing factors in the consumption function of the classical economics, such as: the consumer's disposable income, the price of goods and price elasticity, consumption habits, education level, age, gender and so on, and introduce these rational influencing factors as control variables into the empirical model. Price elasticity, consumption habits, education level, age, gender and so on, such rational influences as control variables into the empirical model (Orden-Mejia, 2022). Regarding the triggers of irrational consumption, regardless of the form of irrational consumption, it is always due to the cognitive bias of the actors that leads to some degree of behavioral bias. The stages of its emergence may be the information processing bias before making a decision, the behavioral bias at the point of time of making a decision and the analytical bias after making a decision, respectively. When applying cognitive bias theory in this paper, we mainly draw on the research results related to pre-decision information processing bias in cognitive bias theory.

Rational Consumption Theory explores the consumption strategies and behaviors adopted by actors to maximize their utility under a given budget constraint. In the assumption of complete rationality, the actor, through the summary of previous consumption, forms a foreknowledge of the utility that can be obtained from the consumption of consumer goods, and in order to maximize his own utility, he strictly follows the law of diminishing marginal utility to carry out rational consumption (Coca-Stefaniak, 2021). The goal is clear, the thinking is meticulous, the information asymmetry is eliminated through price comparison, and the moral hazard is reduced through contract. In the inter-period decision-making, the actor is able to do according to their own income growth, consumption expenditure status quo increase or decrease their own purchases and consumption, formulate a reasonable and perfect plan and deal with the relationship between investment, consumption and savings, to achieve a balanced balance of income and expenditure of the equilibrium state.

2.2. Analysis of Irrational Factors in Consumer Decision Making in Behavioral Economics

Irrational consumption is the opposite. Instead of maximizing utility, the actor cares about whether or not he or she can "enjoy" the product. Before making a purchase, the actor lacks a clear consumption purpose, lacks a clear utility goal, lacks an understanding of the product or has too broad a range of utility that the product can produce. Another cannot be ignored is the influence of the social environment on irrational consumption behavior, the herd, follow the trend, short-sightedness and other phenomena affect the short-term consumption behavior of the actors. And in the long run, there are manifestations of irrational

consumption behaviors such as credit overdraft and depleted consumption in **Figure 1**.

When investigating the consumption of newly rich people, it is believed that the “leisure class” has created the symbol of cultural consumption, and at the same time constructed the leisure lifestyle and value criterion, while the ordinary cultural consumers at the lower level always want to imitate the “leisure class” at the top of the social pyramid. Cultural consumption creates fashions, and fashions are the product of class distinctions. The “double-sided” nature of cultural consumption is proposed here: on the one hand, it brings the masses together to create fashions, and on the other hand, it allows different classes to differentiate themselves by doing so. There is a concept of “symbolic value” in consumption. Cultural consumption is symbolic consumption such as motivation, content, methods, and rules of consumption. Cultural consumption has a dual role: on the one hand, it provides use value; on the other hand, it also defines social relations. Early foreign scholars focused on the division of classes by cultural consumption, while later scholars paid more attention to the study of the characteristics of cultural products, i.e., any consumption of cultural products reflects two attributes of cultural products: the commodity attribute in itself and the value symbol behind it, i.e., the spiritual attribute. In the research on the connotation of cultural consumption in China, the definitions are similar. People think that cultural consumption refers to “the behavior of people consuming spiritual and cultural products and services in different ways to satisfy their spiritual and cultural life”.

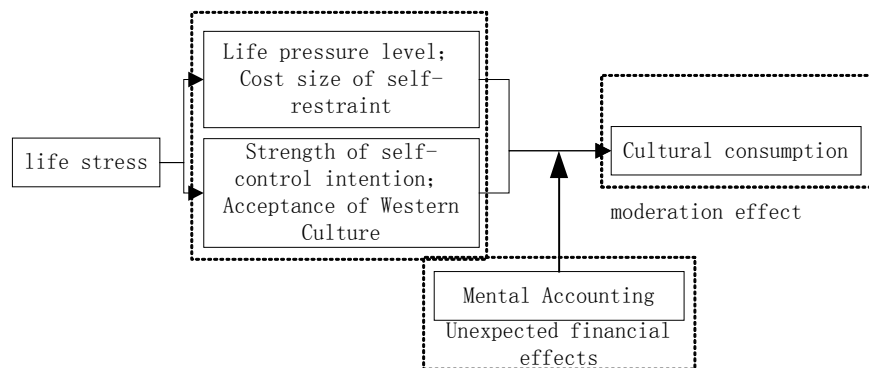


Figure 1. Shows the transmission path of irrational factors.

3. Basic Concepts and Influencing Factors of Cultural Consumption

Cultural consumption was first mentioned in Van Buren’s 1899 book *The Idle Class*. In his examination of the consumption of the newly rich, he first proposed the theory of conspicuous consumption, arguing that the “idle class” created symbols of cultural consumption and constructed leisure lifestyles and value norms, while the vast number of ordinary cultural consumers in the lower

classes would always want to emulate the “idle class” at the top of the social pyramid. The “leisure class” at the top of the social pyramid. Georg Simmel proposed in *Urban and Spiritual Life* that “cultural consumption creates popular trends, and popularity is a product of class differentiation”, and for the first time put forward the “double-sidedness” of cultural consumption, the herd, and differentiation: On the one hand, it brings the masses together to create fashions, but on the other hand, it allows different classes to differentiate themselves through it. Jean Baudrillard first put forward the concept of “symbolic value” in consumption, and he believed that cultural consumption refers to consumption whose motives, contents, methods and rules are all symbolized.

After combing through the foreign theories of cultural consumption, we can easily find that cultural consumption has a dual role, on the one hand, it provides the use value, on the other hand, it also defines the social relationship (Tavitiyaman, 2021). Early foreign scholars focused on the division of class by cultural consumption, but later scholars paid more attention to the study of the characteristics of cultural products, that is, any consumption of cultural products reflects the two attributes of cultural products: the commodity attribute of itself and the symbol of value behind it, i.e., the spiritual attribute. In the domestic research on the connotation of cultural consumption, the definitions are more or less the same, basically they all think that cultural consumption refers to “people’s behavior of consuming spiritual and cultural products and services in different ways in order to satisfy their spiritual and cultural life”. Figure 2 shows an overview of the development of the cultural industry and cultural consumption.

China in the past ten years, the national support for the cultural industry has been enhanced, cultural and related industries financial expenditure rose year after year, the value added of the cultural industry is also synchronized with the early steady and benign upward trend, indicating that China’s government

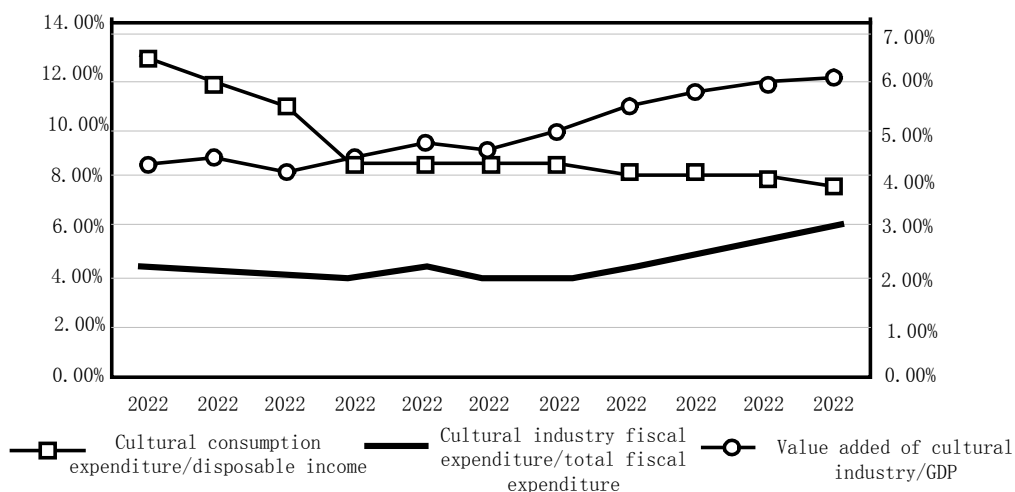


Figure 2. Overview of cultural industry development and cultural consumption.

financial expenditures on the development of the cultural industry to help the role of policy support for the development of the cultural industry plays a crucial role (Torabi, 2022). However, at the same time, the cultural consumption rate of the residents (the ratio of cultural consumption expenditure to disposable income) has been declining year by year, and the development of economy and the support of the industry have failed to stimulate the cultural consumption. Generally speaking, cultural consumption is different from general material consumption in that it expands the material form outward to the cultural form. The unique ideological attributes will also have a subtle impact in the process of consumption decision-making. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory shows that people will produce developmental consumption and spiritual and cultural needs after satisfying the basic material needs of life (Um, 2021). Therefore, the influencing factors of cultural consumption demand have their own specificity, including the influence of economic, social and cultural factors. The most direct factors affecting the consumption of cultural products are the price of the product itself and the income of consumers. The regression according to the grouping of high and low income found that price is the primary factor in the influence of cultural consumption of low- and middle-income rural residents: for consumers in the high-income group, the level of cultural consumption in the previous period has a more significant impact on the current expenditure on culture, education and entertainment. The cultural factor is what makes cultural consumer goods special, and taste and appreciation are the primary factors influencing cultural consumption (Nam, 2021). In addition, family education atmosphere and past cultural experiences have a greater impact on the formation of personal taste and appreciation ability. Cultural consumption can be understood as the direct participation of consumers in cultural activities or events, and it is a kind of consumption aimed at obtaining experiential utility. Consumers assess the utility of cultural consumption more from the perspective of experience or emotion than from the perspective of the quality of the product itself (Zhu, 2021). Therefore, consumers' decisions on the choice of cultural product consumption are not only negatively determined by their own constraints such as preference constraints, economic constraints, etc., but also positively influenced by trends in society and other subjects in social networks.

The influencing factors of cultural consumption include intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic factors include physiological factors, economic income and psychological factors. Physiological factors mainly refer to gender and age, and women and men show more obvious differences in cultural consumption, with women engaging in cultural consumption activities more often than men. Economic income has a decisive influence on consumers' consumption behavior, and changes in consumers' absolute income, relative income, actual income and expected income all have an impact on consumption behavior. Psychological factors refer to the process of consumers' mental activities when purchasing and consuming cultural products, including consumers' interests and hobbies, needs,

motives, perceptions and abilities.

Extrinsic factors include socio-cultural factors such as culture, social class and reference groups. Socio-cultural factors tend to influence social classes and families, which in turn influence consumer behavior through personal and psychological factors. The influence of social culture on consumer psychology is profound and enormous, and can directly or indirectly affect consumers' interests, hobbies, thoughts, etc., which in turn affects consumer behavior.

4. Analysis of the Influence Mechanism of Irrational Factors on Cultural Consumption Decisions

4.1. Mechanisms of Stress Perception and Self-Restraint on Consumption Rate

Cultural consumption refers to a kind of consumption that uses cultural products or services to satisfy people's spiritual needs, mainly including education, cultural entertainment, sports and fitness, and tourism and sightseeing. The content of cultural consumption is very broad, including not only the consumption of specialized spiritual, theoretical and other cultural products, but also the consumption of cultural consumption tools and means; including both the direct consumption of cultural products, such as the consumption of movies and television programs, electronic game software, books and magazines, and the consumption of all kinds of material consumer goods for the purpose of consuming cultural products, such as televisions, cameras, DVD players, computers and so on. It also requires a variety of cultural facilities, such as libraries, exhibition halls, theaters and so on.

Due to the accelerated pace of social change, frequent career changes and the increasing complexity of interpersonal relationships, consumers in the knowledge-based economy are faced with greater work intensity and competition than ever before, and are constantly challenged to live a life that requires them to endure multidimensional and high-intensity pressures (Wang, 2022). Consumption as an effective way for people to release pressure has been recognized both in practice and in theory. Consumers' decisions in the face of stress show more irrational factors. High sense of stress is related to short-term preference in intertemporal decision-making, the two used the social stress test paradigm (TSST) to conduct stress tests in the laboratory, and found that individuals under stress are more inclined to make short-term decisions during intertemporal decision-making, which may be related to the operation of the dual-system decision-making model, and the consumption of energy for self-control. **Figure 3** shows the low-value transmission path of cultural products and services.

It can be seen from **Figure 3**, if consumers in the consumption, the purpose of releasing pressure is stronger, in the consumption of more focus on their own experience, more emotional, reduce the consumption of rational decision-making process, seeking a kind of impulsive consumption behavior, as a way to offset the embarrassment brought about by the pressure, to seek more stimulation. The study of consumer impulsive consumption behavior of malefactors found that

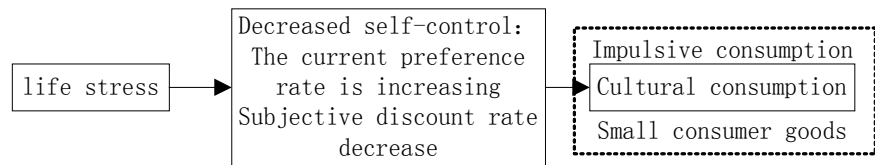


Figure 3. Low-value transmission paths for cultural goods and services.

the release of pressure is an important psychological trigger for impulsive consumption. Consuming subjects under pressure show an increased tendency to engage in irrational consumption behavior, which ultimately leads to a rise in total consumption. Consumers usually experience an uncontrollable impulsive drive in their non-essential consumption decisions. Since this impulsive consumption is subject to an uncontrollable impulsive drive, its manifestation in the consumption of necessities is not significant. The everyday nature of necessity consumption determines the rationality of consumption decisions. The impulsive consumption behavior and decisions of consumers are often related to psychological needs that can be satisfied, and this type of consumption tends to be more significant in the consumption of products related to entertainment and mental satisfaction.

Since the consumption of cultural goods and services is a typical category of non-essential consumption, consumers engage in cultural consumption for the purpose of obtaining spiritual satisfaction and pleasure, which also coincides with the consumption purpose of releasing stress. Therefore, as cultural consumption has the dual attributes of both non-essential consumer goods and spiritual consumer goods. When consumers face pressure in life, cultural products and services become the consumer goods category that consumers choose to relieve pressure. On the one hand, the attribute of spiritual consumer goods determines that the consumption process of cultural products and services has the function of calming consumers' psychological anxiety. On the other hand, the expenditure on cultural products and services accounts for a small proportion of consumers' total income, and consumers are more likely to make irrational consumption decisions in the field of cultural consumer goods. Therefore, cultural products and services have become a category of consumer goods in which consumers are more likely to make impulsive consumption decisions when they are under pressure in life.

From the theoretical derivation of the consumer individual game, it can be seen that the mechanism of life pressure on the consumer decision maker is mainly through reducing the consumer's self-restraint ability and stimulating impulsive consumption. The weaker the self-restraint ability of consumers, the higher the consumption rate after facing the pressure stimulation. This is reflected in two aspects: on the one hand, the cost of self-restraint is higher, and on the other hand, the consumer's self-control is weak (subjective). The magnitude of self-restraint cost can be directly reflected by the magnitude of life pressure faced by consumers. That is: the greater the life pressure, the higher the cost of

self-restraint, consumers are more inclined to increase the consumption rate. Pressure from all aspects of modern society will lead to consumer decision-making subject to make “short-sighted behavior”, in the inter-period decision-making, there is a deviation between the decision-making time point and behavioral time point, in the behavior of more preferred to increase the near-term consumption and aversion to the long-term consumption, “just-in-time effects” is evident in the stress group. At this time, consumers are more inclined to increase the purchase quantity of products that can obtain mental pleasure. And cultural consumer goods with its small expenditure and decompression attributes become the ideal channel for consumers to release stress. Therefore, it is concluded that the consumption rate of cultural products is positively correlated with the degree of personal life stress, and the higher and stronger the life stress, the higher the rate of cultural consumption. At the same time, consumption self-control ability is a component of self-behavioral control ability. Different consumption concepts lead to different degrees of openness and conservatism in consumption behavior, and regions dominated by traditional Confucianism have more self-restraint ability than regions dominated by Western consumption concepts. It is further concluded that the consumption rate of cultural products is influenced by the strength of self-control ability, and the higher the acceptance of Western culture, the more significant the influence of life pressure on cultural consumption.

4.2. Mechanisms of the Psychological Account’s Moderating Influence on Cultural Consumption

The Mental Account Theorem focuses on the process by which actors mentally categorize outcomes (especially economic outcomes) for bookkeeping, coding, valuation, budgeting, etc. Consumers may form corresponding mental accounts based on different tasks when making decisions. In the early stages of development, the theory of mental accounts was more akin to an empirical summary, and long-term observation of economic agents revealed that when consuming, people make unsupported habitual groupings of monetary expenditures. For example: food expenses are in one group, clothing expenses in another, rent expenses in a third and so on. Each group of goods has a unique mental account. Each finite rational consumer, when making behavioral decisions, usually follows a mental arithmetic rule that is contrary to the assumptions of traditional classical economics, and their internal accounting is very different from the rational decision-making models of economics and mathematics. The motivation for consumers to establish mental accounts is to utilize mental accounts to simplify the entire decision-making process and facilitate people’s daily consumption decisions. The creation of mental accounts is related to the efforts of “limited rationality” to become “rationality”, but it is “a bad thing with good intentions”. Each mental account uses a different frame of reference when people make spending decisions, so that the accounts are not fully substitutable for each other, and each participates in spending decisions on its own.

In addition to this, due to the fact that China's consumption concepts advocate thrift and the profound influence of Confucian cultural concepts on the consumption concepts of Chinese residents since ancient times, the marginal propensity to consume of Chinese consumers has always been at a relatively low level. Especially in the field of non-necessity consumption, Chinese consumers are very cautious attitude towards consumption. As a non-necessity consumption, cultural consumption is categorized as "light luxury" in consumers' psychological perception. Before consuming cultural products, the utility expectation that cultural consumption can bring to consumers is not as clear as that of general commodities. For example, before consuming food, consumers have certain knowledge about the satiety and nutritional value that food can bring, and in the long-term practice of repeated consumption, the utility that the consumption can bring can meet the requirements of the basic assumptions of rational people. As for "light luxuries", consumers in China usually categorize their consumption as non-necessity consumption. With a high proportion of household property income, consumers tend to be more inclined to impulsive consumption, especially when they are under pressure, and irrational consumption behavior is enhanced, increasing the demand for non-essential and stress-relieving consumer goods.

Comprehensive analysis of the above, in order to ensure the sustainable development of China's cultural industry should explore new ways to expand domestic demand, help the development of emerging consumption; in-depth promotion of supply-side reform, expanding cultural consumption according to local conditions; improve the structure of family income, increase property income to enhance the people's sense of achievement; increase the supply of public cultural products, easing the pressure on society.

5. Results of the Study

Based on the theoretical foundation of behavioral economics and cultural economics, this paper explores the influence of irrational factors on cultural consumption. The following research conclusions are drawn:

First, life pressure and residents' cultural consumption show a significant positive correlation.

Second, the psychological account effect significantly affects residents' cultural consumption. Controlling for residents' family characteristics and regional characteristics, the influence of residents' property income ratio on residents' cultural consumption passes the 1% significance test. It shows that under the effect of "windfall", residents are more willing to consume cultural products and services.

Third, the level of consumers' willingness to self-restraint is negatively related to the influence of irrational factors on cultural consumption.

Fourth, the mental account effect has a positive moderating effect on the impact of life pressure on cultural consumption. The higher the proportion of property income when residents are under life pressure, the more frequent the

residents' cultural consumption under life pressure.

Fifth, the attribute of lower unit value of cultural products is the main transmission mechanism of irrational factors on cultural consumption. Consumers under the role of life pressure, due to the impact of self-control cognitive bias will lead to their behavior in the lower unit value of the consumption category out of control. This proves that the inexpensive character of cultural consumption is one of the transmission paths of the influence mechanism of irrational factors on cultural consumption.

6. Concluding Remarks

Based on the theory of behavioral economics and cultural economics, this paper explores the influence of irrational factors on cultural consumption. The following research conclusions are drawn: first, life stress and residents' cultural consumption show a significant positive correlation. Second, the psychological account effect significantly affects residents' cultural consumption. However, limited to the current stage of theoretical development, insufficient data and researcher's ability constraints, the research in this paper still has many shortcomings, and there is a wide space for future research on this issue. Specifically, the direction of future research can be summarized as follows: the study of cultural consumption is from the perspective of consumption, ignoring the study of consumption structure. In the field of cultural consumption, there are basic cultural consumption and improved cultural consumption, and there are significant differences in the choice of cultural consumption among consumers of different income classes, education levels and consumption views. And limited to the limited data, this paper did not do a detailed categorization study on the research samples. In future research, we can consider grouping consumers according to income, occupation and other economic and social attributes, on the basis of which we can explore the size of the influence rate of irrational factors. Under the background of China's economic restructuring and industrial restructuring, China's cultural industry will also enter a new stage of development. Cultural consumption, as the final and most important link in the cultural industry chain, plays a crucial role in upgrading the structure of China's cultural industry. At present, the level of cultural consumption in China is generally low, and the potential of cultural consumption has not been effectively developed. Enhancing the level of cultural consumption of Chinese residents is a guarantee for the sustainable development of China's cultural industry.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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