Part I Culture
The Basic Spirit of Ancient Chinese Culture

Chinese culture has formed its own typical spirit gradually during a long development process. The basic spirit of Chinese culture is the reflection of a value system, mode of thinking, social mentality, ethical ideas and aesthetic taste of the Chinese nation. The basic spirit of Chinese culture is a wide and neutral conception, belonging to the category of fact judgment. The excellent elements in the basic spirit of Chinese culture constitute the national spirit, and become the inner motivation keeping the Chinese nation moving forward.

I. Schools of thought on the basic spirit of ancient Chinese culture

Some scholars think the ideological basis that has developed over a long period of time can be called the basic spirit of Chinese culture, which is the internal motivation resulting from a long developmental process. In other words, this is the basic idea that leads the national culture to move. The basic spirit of Chinese culture is the main characteristic of the spiritual form of the Chinese nation, and it includes: (1) being energetic and promising; (2) being harmonious and moderate; (3) advocating good virtues and pragmatism; (4) coordinating nature and human beings: “They are the basic spirit of ancient Chinese culture”.1

The basic national spirit of China can be seen in two famous sayings from The Book of Changes: “As Heaven maintains vigour through movement, a gentle man should constantly strive for self-perfection”. “As earth’s condition is receptive devotion, a gentle man should hold the outer world with a broad mind”.

“Constantly striving for self-perfection” and “holding the outer world with a broad mind” can be regarded as the basic spirit of traditional Chinese culture. Apart from these, the basic spirit can be described as: (1) harmony between nature and man; (2) people oriented; (3) vigourous and promising; (4) and harmonious.2

Some scholars think that: “The basic spirit of Chinese culture is integration and freedom”.3
In some scholars’ view, the patriarchy level and ethical codes that are based on the self-sufficient natural economy and the family, should be the main clue, essence and core of the five aspects running through ancient Chinese society, including social production activities and productivity, social production relationships, the social system, social mentality, and forms of social consciousness: “This is the basic spirit of traditional ancient Chinese culture”.4

In some scholars’ eyes, the national spirit of China can be generally summarized into four connected aspects: First, rational spirit, manifested as a long history of atheistic tradition, full affirmation of the integration of human and nature and between individuals and society, and advocacy that the satisfaction of the individual’s emotion and desire should meet the rational needs of society. Generally speaking, the spirit does not accept the worship of a supernatural God, and the existence of the “other world”. It strongly advocates harmonious unity between human and nature, and the integration between individual and society. It opposes their separation and conflict. This is the basis of the rational Chinese spirit.

Second, free spirit. This kind of spirit was first shown among the people who fought against the exploiting class. Meanwhile, when fighting against foreign nations, some people from the ruling class also fought. It means that the traditional culture of the ruling class also had an active, “strong love of freedom”.

Third, practical spirit. Confucianism in the pre-Qin period advocated: “do not pretend to know what you do not know”. It opposed the view of being born wise and learned when commenting on man and the world; Legalism denied “prior knowledge,” and focused on “participation and experiment,” emphasized practical activity, and praised utilitarianism; while Taoism advocated “knowing others,” “self-awareness” and “analyzing the truth of all things on earth. All these ideas were the examples of the practical spirit.

Fourth then, the spirit of adaptability.5

Some researchers hold the opinion that the basic spirit of traditional Chinese culture “can be summarized as ‘respect the ancestors, think highly of the human relations, advocate morality, and emphasize…etiquette’”.6 In addition, traditional Chinese culture has a developmental viewpoint, striving unceasingly and never tiring of study.7

According to some researchers, the spirit of Chinese culture is characterized by humanism, manifested in the following aspects: it does not isolate individuals from interpersonal relationships, and it does not oppose humans and nature; it does not pursue a pure system of natural knowledge; it advocates utilitarianism in its value system; it emphasizes the conduct of the individual.

The humanism of Chinese culture has brought credit to our nation, but also set up obstacles; it has spread the light of wisdom to the rest of the world, but also opened gaps for the exchange of culture. It is a great spiritual treasure. It is also a cultural load.8
II. The cultural spirit with humanism as its core

Chinese culture perceives everything from the heart and life of human beings, and its moral principles and political culture are characterized by the search for good governance. It replaces religious belief with the moral feeling, and prevents the possibility of fervent national religion. Theology has never been a mainstream ideology in China, and clericalism has never overridden the power of the emperor. On the contrary, the monarchical power always exceeds the clerical and overwhelms it. From an overall perspective, and seen from the inner motivation and outward manifestation, the core of the spirit of Chinese culture is humanism. This claim is explicated below.

1. Constantly striving for self-perfection

One of the essential perspectives of Chinese culture is that it constantly strives for self-perfection.

There is a famous saying in the Book of Changes, “As Heaven maintains vigour through movements, a gentle man should constantly strive for self-perfection”, “The great attribute of Heaven and Earth is giving and maintaining life”. These generalize and vividly reflect on the Chinese people's spirit of energy and promise, and of constantly striving for self-perfection.

Confucius advocated and tried to practice the spirit of “being so immersed in work as to forget one's meals”, and despised the life attitude of those people who “stuff themselves with food the whole day, without applying their mind to anything good”. He is the man “who is in his eager pursuit of knowledge and forgets his food, who is in the joy of its attainment and forgets his sorrows, and who does not perceive that old age is coming on”.

Confucius also believed that one need not be full when eating, need not be comfortable when living, but should be industrious and agile when working, be careful and cautious when talking, to correct one's behaviors from the masters, and that such a man can be considered a studious gentleman.

From the Han dynasty to the Qing dynasty, through more than 2,000 years, the thought of the Book of Changes gradually permeated, and its ideas became accepted by society. Not only intellectuals but also ordinary people are encouraged by its words:

When Xibo, the Earl of the West, was imprisoned at Youli, he expanded The Book of Changes; Confucius was in distress and he made The Spring and Autumn Annals; Qu Yuan was banished and he composed his poem “Encountering Sorrow”; after Zuo Qiu lost his sight, he wrote The Conversation from the States; when Sun Wu had his feet amputated in punishment, he set forth the Art of War; Lü Buwei was banished to Shu but his Spring and Autumn of Mr. Lü...
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has been handed down through the ages; Han Fei, trapped in the prison of Qin, brought into being his *Shuo Nan* and *Gu Fen*. The three hundred pieces in the *The Book of Songs* were mostly works venting the indignation of sages and men of virtue.\textsuperscript{10}

This famous quote reflects a people’s spirit and indomitable will. The more the Chinese nation suffered a setback, the more its people would rise and fight. Some might argue that this merely reflects the upper class intellectuals’ striving for self-improvement. However, such folk sayings as, “though one is poor, he has lofty aspirations”, and “knife would go to rust if not sharpened, people would be left behind if they do not learn” suggest otherwise. Many Chinese people would be given the name of *ziqiang* (self-reliant). The spirit of self-reliance has become very general.

It is exactly the spirit of vigour, promise, and constantly striving to become stronger that has promoted the development of Chinese culture and society. With every invasion and change of leader, the Chinese have fought against invasion and oppression.

Numerous people with lofty ideals kept on fighting and devoted themselves to the fight. Such excitement was expressed in the poem, “It is said the Northern Gate is recaptured of late; when the news reaches my ears, and my gown is wet with tears. Staring at my wife’s face, of grief I find no trace; rolling up my verse books, my joy like madness looks”;\textsuperscript{11} the exclamation was expressed in such lines as “He died before he accomplished his career. How heroes could not wet their sleeves with tear on tear!”;\textsuperscript{12} or “the refugees are still suffering from the war and expecting to recover their country, and numerous people are weeping each night tonight”;\textsuperscript{13} or the ambition as expressed in such lines as “do not forget to tell your dead father in the family sacrificial rites when our army has recovered the lost land”;\textsuperscript{14} and in these lines: “My bow like a full moon, and aiming northwest, I will shoot down the fierce Wolf from the sky”.\textsuperscript{15} This is the spirit of self-improvement expressed through a high-level of self-confidence and self-esteem. It is this spirit of self-improvement that nurtures self-reliance and rising against the oppressor; ceaseless learning and moving forward.

2. Being upright and straightforward

Chinese people always uphold justice, and have the courage to seek truth and advocate integrity. Under the gradual influence of traditional culture, especially the Confucian, Chinese people advocate integrity, and place great store by lofty sentiment. This nurtures strong national pride and noble virtue. In the pre-Qin period, Confucius advocated: “Man takes death over humiliation” and “The commander of the forces of a large state may be carried off, but the will of even a common man cannot be taken from him”. Mencius called for the personality of
a great man that: “Neither riches nor honors can corrupt him; neither poverty nor humbleness can make him swerve from principle; and neither threats nor forces can subdue him”. Tao Yuanming in the Jin dynasty, “would not bow to the superior merely to get the scanty pay”. Li Bai in the Tang dynasty declared: “Why should I serve the high and mighty with lowered eyes and on bent knees? Such things can never make my heart rejoice”. These are typical expressions, showing an insistence on moral integrity. Even though loss of personal wealth and even fatal disaster might ensue, they would never lose their determination and dignity.

Fan Zhen in Qi and Liang of the Southern dynasties insisted on fighting the conception of karma and theory of spiritual imperishability in Buddhism, despite the coercion of Xiao Ziliang, the King of Jingling in the Qi dynasty and Xiao Yan, the Wudi Emperor of the Liang dynasty. They demonstrated their righteousness and would never, “sell off their own theory in order to get a position”.

Huan Tan, a righteous man in the Eastern Han dynasty, was clearly aware that the Emperor Guangwu was superstitious in prophecy and destiny, yet still dared to challenge the Emperor face to face. According to the historical records: “Huan Tan... is simple and does not care about the etiquette. What he likes is not the ordinary or popular views of the scholars, so he was always rejected and defamed... When Wang Mang usurped the power and took the Emperor's position, all the people flatter and appealed to him, in order to get a position in his court, only Huan Tan kept his own principle and said nothing”. He submitted a written statement to Emperor Guangwu and believed that the rise and fall of a country was determined by governmental affairs, while the success and failure of governmental affairs depended on whether the assistants were wise or not. However, as “the emperor was addicted to prophecy, and the decisions were mainly made by that,” Huan Tan's statement was not able to be shown to the Emperor. Therefore, Huan Tan became “so depressed and discontented and submitted his statement again even this might cause his death,” pointing out that, “nowadays, the petty persons compile the books and profess that these books are the prophecy and destiny talisman, in order to cheat the greedy and malevolent people, and you the Emperor are also implicated, why don't you stay away from these people?” He criticized the Emperor Guangwu “it is a great fault that you believe in the prophecy and destiny talisman”. When the Emperor Guangwu asked Huan Tan: “what do you think if we decide this issue by the prophecy?” Huan Tan stayed in silence for a long time and replied: “I don't understand that”. As a result, Huan Tan was charged for “defaming the Emperor and disregarding law and discipline”, and he was almost beheaded. This example shows that there were intellectuals in ancient China seeking truth and a correct path.

The well-known Bo Yi and Shu Qi, the son of Gentleman Guzhu in the late Shang dynasty, stopped the horse of King Wu of Zhou and admonished him not to fight with King Zhou of Shang. When King Wu of Zhou conquered Shang dynasty, they “were ashamed of eating [chestnuts] produced by the Zhou dynasty” and starved to death on the Shouyang Mountain. Frankly speaking, Bo Yi and Shu Qi opposed the progressive and righteous war, but if we picked the detailed content
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out, and examined it on the general value orientation and theoretical meaning, we have to admit that they really showed their honesty and uprightness in some aspects.

As for the value principles of life such as “acting bravely for a just cause”, “never declining to do charity,” or “killing oneself for a noble cause,” people have been delighting in talking about them, and have been carrying them out in reality for thousands of years.

The tradition of advocating the righteous and striving for the lofty sentiments nurses a sense of righteousness and the concept of right and wrong amongst outstanding Chinese intellectuals and the majority of the people, and contributes to forming the noble spirit of the Chinese nation. Especially when the country was suffering from adversity, or at critical moments, all the people would give priority to the interest of the country. The emergence of numerous national heroes in history is a clear evidence for it.

Admittedly, the concept of advocating the righteous and striving for lofty sentiments in traditional Chinese culture also has serious defects. For example, the traditional concept of sentiment strives for the “distinction of nobleman and vile character” and “distinction between Chinese and barbarians,” which implies chauvinism or egotism, and an aristocratic consciousness scornful of foreign nationalities. This kind of egotism always becomes a narrow mentality when communicating with foreign nationalities. Another example is that the traditional concept of sentiment has sometimes become the catalyst of the literati and officialdom in feudal China to compete with each other or to form gangs. The traditional concept of sentiment always appears as the worship of some abstract concept without considering class distinction or the nature of political power. These examples all have their typical historical limitation. We will make a scientific judgment by drawing from historical materialism.

3. Upholding harmony and mean

One of the basic spirits of Chinese culture is upholding harmony and mean. Focusing on harmony, and insisting on mean, is the spirit that soaks through the pores of Chinese national culture.

Shi Bo in the late Western Zhou dynasty and Yan Ying at the end of the Spring and Autumn Period were the men who first discussed the harmony theory. Shi Bo emphasized the coordination of different elements to balance conflicts in order to reach a harmonious result. Harmony of five different tastes could produce delicious foods; harmony of six different temperaments could form music pleasing to the ear; a king who could accept different opinions from different people could manage the situation such that, “harmonious and happy... they were one”. Only “harmony” can “produce all the things,” so that “all the things would become substantial and grow up”. This is a practical theory.
Yan Yin used the idea of "supplementation" and "perfection" to enrich the connotation of "harmony". He applied his theory to the monarch-subject relationship, and laid stress on the importance of "supplementation and perfection" when the monarch and his subjects were dealing with government affairs. Through the comprehensive balance of, "supplementing the weakness to make up for the defect" in order to keep, "government affairs mild and not to go against... courtesy," a harmonious relationship between the monarch and his subjects might be maintained.

Confucius used the concept of "keeping within the bounds" to rule the limitation of harmony. In his view, going beyond the limit was as bad as falling short, and everything should take its "middle part" as the guarantee and achievement of "harmony," while propriety was the principle of taking the "middle part". If we are forced to pursue harmony, it is harmony that is "hypocrite-like," and the "thief of morality".

The Doctrine of Mean promotes this Confucian concept of "keeping within the bounds" to a philosophical height. From "perfect morals" to "great fundamental virtues of the world" and "practical principle of the world," which emphasizes achieving harmony between man and man, humanity and natural law through learning from experience, and practice.

Yi Zhuan materializes the idea of harmony into the separation of Yin and Yang, the orientation of softness and firmness, and precedence between the monarch and subjects, subjects and ordinary people of social political relationship, and between father and children, husband and wife in the family, and strictly defines the class order where Yang is more worshipful than Yin, and firmness is higher than softness.

Seen as a whole, the harmony theory of the Pre-Qi dynasty is theoretically based on the Doctrine of the Mean, and sets the proprieties as the standard, limited by harmony, and characterized by maintenance of integrity and inhibition and elimination of competitive systems. Confucius said that: "In practicing the rules of propriety, a natural ease is to be prized. In the ways prescribed by the ancient kings, this is the excellent quality, and in things small and great we follow them. Yet it is not to be observed in all cases. If one, knowing how such ease should be prized, manifests it, without regulating it by the rules of propriety, this likewise is not to be done". This emphasizes harmony-based proprieties, and proprieties abstract from the base of diversity, inconsistency, and even the conflict of things.

Just like the precocity of Chinese culture, Confucian harmony theory that might represent the basic spirit of ancient China is also precocious. It was born in the period when "disturbances arose repeatedly" and "The system of the Tao (the Way) was about to be torn in fragments all under the sky". We might say it was a little inopportune or inappropriate.

The real content it insisted on and the value orientation it reflected were quite different in that period of "fighting with brute force". However, it nevertheless represented the basic spirit of ethical political culture; its conservative aspect highlighted an important value after the situation of the times had changed from turbulent chaos into peace.
Thus, Chinese feudal society stepped into the normal track after the Qin and Han dynasty; the Confucian idea of upholding harmony and mean met the political need for unification, and the tender affection satisfied the moral and emotional need of a patriarchal society, and thus formed the principles of a national psychology. Whether it was Dong Zhongshu’s three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues as well as the theory of interactions between Heaven and mankind, or the idea of “upholding the truth of nature and exterminating human desire” from the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties, they were all defined by the concept of mean and harmony. However, they were also different from Confucian harmony theory in the Pre-Qin dynasty. Zhang Zai of the Northern Song dynasty had pointed out in his famous Xi Ming: “living is worth celebrating and death means total peace”. It was the concentrated reflection of upholding harmony and mean in individual experience.

Upholding harmony and mean, as the soul of Eastern culture and part of Chinese culture, has exerted deep and profound influence upon our nation. As the whole nation identifies with this idea, the Chinese people pay attention to the achievement and maintenance of harmony. They will not go to extremes when doing things, and will do their best to protect collective interests. They will seek common ground on major issues while reserving differences on minor ones, which has become a principle of thought. These have played an active role in gathering and extending the national spirit, maintaining a uniform and multiracial regime.

However, this idea rejects competition and conflict. Therefore, it has an evident drawback. It does harm to individual creativity, inhibits the growth of competition and morality, and more often than not, becomes the tool of feudal rulers, used to maintain hierarchical order for authoritarian governance.

4. People are the foundation of the state

The thought that people are the foundation of the state is also one of the basic aspects of Chinese culture.

It is a tradition that has run through the culture, and gives prominence to Chinese humanism.

This thought can be traced back to the Yin and Zhou dynasties. In the Chapter of Pan Geng in the Book of History, there were such statements as “pay attention to my people,” “we should not let the people’s expectations down,” “bestow real good upon the people,” and “we should move people to their advantage”. The duke of Zhou saw the power and function of ordinary people from the fall of the Yin dynasty and brought about the thought of “protecting the people”. On his view, public opinions were a reflection of God’s will, and the dignity and sincerity of God could be seen from public feelings: “awful though Heaven be, it yet helps the sincere; the feelings of the people can for the most part be discerned”.

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The Great Declaration said: “what the people desire, Heaven will be found to give effect to”. In the ancient books and records such as The Tso Chuan and Guo Yu, the thought of attaching importance to people occurs many times. Such as: “for people, they are the master of Gods. So the wise emperors should help people to fulfill their wishes and then commit themselves to Gods”; “good fortune [does not come] unless the people are harmonious;” “a country would become prosperous if it listens to the people, and it would fall if it listens to the Gods”.

Of course, the thought of attaching importance to people that can be found in these books gave no personal dignity, or the right to supervise the rulers to people themselves. It was merely towards “making the country prosperous” and maintain the ruling order. Emphasizing the importance of people was only a means to this end.

This thought can typically be found in Confucian theory. It can even be claimed as the basis of Confucian political theory. Whether the needs of people can be met or not is the essence of whether or not politics succeeds.

Confucius advocated making people rich and educated, emphasizing “people, food, funeral, and sacrifice,” with people heading the list. Mencius insisted on the basic principle that: “The people are the most important element in a nation; the spirits of the land and grain are the next; and the sovereign is the lightest,” suggesting that the emperors should care about the people or the dynasty will fall. He said: “A ruler, who carries the oppression of his people to the highest pitch, will himself be slain, and his kingdom will perish. If one stops short of the highest pitch, his life will notwithstanding be in danger, and his kingdom will be weakened”. He also said: “to gain the peasantry is the way to become sovereign” and “Jie and Zhou’s losing the throne arose from their losing the people, and to lose the people means to lose their hearts. There is a way to get the kingdom: get the people, and the kingdom is got”. Xunzi said: “in the use of the state, one who gains the strength of the Hundred Clans will be rich, one who obtains their willingness to die will be strong, and one who gains their praise will be honored. One who possesses all three of these “gains” will have the whole world come to him as to their own home. One who ruins these three “gains” will have the whole world leave him”. According to the famous metaphor where the ruler is the boat and the people are the water, the water can both carry and overturn.

Not only Confucian but also Taoism emphasized people. Lao Tzu said: “there is no unchangeable mind, we should put the people's mind in the first place;” “the reason why people feel hungry is they have paid heavy grain tax”.

Legalism also paid attention. Although they advocated that all the things in the universe should be judged and people ruled by law, they nevertheless conceded that public feeling is the basis for enforcing law and a nation’s foundation.

In Han Fei's eye: “every legal nation is based on the public's mind;” “people would become meek where the interests existed” and “the emperors need the people who are ready to risk their lives in the hard time, and make all the efforts to build the country in the peaceful time”.
It was also stated in *Quanxiu* of *Guanzi*: “If the taxes are too heavy, all the people would complain about that; if the power of the public is used up, all the government orders would never take effect”. The chapter of *Junzheng* of *Jingfa* stated: “if the orders meet the public's needs, the public would follow them”. So we can see that philosophers in the Pre-Qin dynasty all put the public first.

This idea further developed in the Han and Tang dynasties. In Jia Yi’s view: “all the political bodies are based on ordinary people... therefore, the security of a country, the honor or disgrace of the subjects and the position of the officials, are all determined by the ordinary people”. “Abstain that! The people who fight against the public, the public must be the winner”. 35

Emperor Taizong of the Tang dynasty said: “the emperor is based on the nation, while the nation is based on the ordinary people, if the ruler is satisfied with being severe to the people, it is just like curing the flesh from body to satisfy one's hunger, one would feel full but he would die, the ruler would be wealthy but the nation would fall”. 36

In the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, this thought had been further strengthened. Zhang Zai in the Northern Song dynasty publicized the thought that “all people are my brothers and all things are my companions”. 37 Sima Guang considered the ordinary people as the “base of a nation”. 38 The Neo-Confucian philosophers Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi claimed that “the ordinary people are the foundation of a state,” and 39 “the pleasure of the public is the basic principle of a ruler”. 40 In Zhu Xi’s view, “there is nothing more important in the world than sympathizing the public”. 41 Wang Fuzhi in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties said that “people are the base of a ruler... the ruler would not keep his foothold without the support of his people”. 42 Tang Zhen said: “how can a nation have the four pillars of governance (referring to the: feudal system, national treasury, royal court and official positions) without people?” 43

There are numerous similar examples. To sum up, whether it was the emperors, the high officials, the advanced thinkers, or the reactionary politicians, they all admitted the importance of the public to the development of a nation, therefore they proposed showing respect to the ordinary people.

The traditional thought that people are the foundation of a state has two expressions in Chinese culture. One is expressed in the ruling class, represented by the feudal emperors. They treated the ordinary people as the base of the regime. They needed to “protect people to guarantee their position,” and they used the power of the public to serve the needs of the throne. The public was simply the source of national tax and military service; merely a tool or a means. The second is expressed by the progressive thinkers, who always voiced concerns about the present situation. They suggested that the ruler should cut tax, and loosen control over the common people, even as a way to fight against tyranny.

Whether it was the former or the latter strand, this thought is not democratic. The democratic thought was put forward at the time of the modern commercial economy, and it was based on law. The idea that the common people are the foundation of a state is to stress of the function of people in a social life characterized
by the ruling of man under the natural economy. It is a call for the ruler to reduce oppression.

These two approaches are fundamentally different. Just as in some scholars’ view, the traditional thought of attaching importance to people does not have the content of citizenship. This thought was proposed for the benefit of the ruler, with the public only the object. Although this idea seems in conflict with the autocratic monarchy, seen as a whole, it cannot be seen to negate autocratic monarchy, only reminding rulers of the condition of their existence.

The thinkers did not object to the rulers, but gave them suggestions on how to improve their rule. They treated this idea of valuing ordinary people as a way to strengthen the position of the rulers. Therefore, this idea can be seen to supplement totalitarianism.44

5. Evenness and equality

Evenness and Equality compose one of the basic spirits of Chinese culture.

Equality is mainly expressed in economic benefit. Evenness is equality, while equality must be performed as evenness. Evenness and equality in the occupation of social wealth and the distribution of the product of labor.

Confucius said: “I have heard that rulers of states and chiefs of families are not troubled lest their people should be few, but are troubled lest they should not keep their several places; that they are not troubled with fears of poverty, but are troubled with fears of a want of contented repose among the people in their several places”. 45 Administering the country and managing a family would not be troubled with the lack of finance, but unequal distribution.

Before Confucius, Yan Yin had already urged, “to even the poor and the rich”.46 Guan Zi thought: “if the national treasury does not have too much storage, and the common people are living on selling their children, it is because the ruler does not have the approach to reach equality”.47 He attributed the poverty of the public to the ruler’s unequal distribution of wealth.

Dong Zhongshu noticed that land annexation was quite serious, “the rich have uninterrupted stretches of land while the poor even have no space to stand”, and strongly advocated “adjustment of evenness”, “limiting the people to use more lands”. People should “allow the riches to show their dignity but not arrogance, the poor should be rich enough to live but not be worried, this is the adjustment of evenness”.48

Not only the thinkers advocated the thought of equality, but also the emperors themselves sometimes carried out the measurement of equality. Such were the policies of evening out and limiting land.

When Wang Mang became emperor of the Han dynasty, he reconstructed the ancient systems, focusing on restoring the “nine squares” system of land ownership in China’s slave society, and set all the lands as state-owned, and named them as
“Wang Tian” (the King’s lands), forbidden to be bought or sold. Instead, the lands were allocated according to the number of family members. The famous system of land equalization and the related kin system in the Northern Wei dynasty were carried out by the small family of a husband and a wife, and there was no difference due to the class of the household. One of the important reforms of Wang Anshi in the Northern Song dynasty was to collect tax according to land ownership. Hai Rui, the famous honest and upright official in the Ming dynasty said, “the way to keep the world peaceful is to implement the policy of ploughing the field. If it did not work, land ownership should be limited; and if this still did not work, tax should be evened”.49

Ideas of evenness and equality were deeply rooted in the farmer’s mind, and its external expression was very intense. The idea of the thinkers and rulers above was largely limited by the thought of farmers, in order to relax the class struggle and prevent revolt.

The farmer’s revolts mostly set equality up as their slogan. The Yellow Turbans Uprising in the late Eastern Han dynasty absorbed the thought of the Scripture of the Great Peace, and came up with “Peace and Equality” as their slogan which means highly equal. Huang Chao’s uprising in the late Tang dynasty set “Evenness” as their slogan. Wang Xiaoobo’s uprising in the Northern Song dynasty set out to “average the poor and rich” as their dream. Zhong Xiang and Yang Mei’s uprising set out to “equal the gentle and simple, average poor and rich”. The farmers’ uprising in the late Yuan advocated “killing all the inequality in the world so that it would become equal”. The farmers’ revolt led by Li Zicheng sought to “average the lands”.

As to the modern times, the Taiping revolt expressed the ideal of equality as “plow the lands, wear the clothes, use the money all together, average exists everywhere and all the people are full and warm”. 50 These ideas attracted and encouraged the farmers, and defeated the base of feudal autocratic rule.

Strictly speaking, equal society has never existed in China. Policies such as averaging the lands or limiting the land adopted by rulers were targeted at relaxing class conflict, but they were not intended to attain to great harmony or equal society. Advocating equality was only a way of considering the issues from the macro and long-term perspective, and against exploitation. The farmers’ uprisings never reached their dream of an equal society due to their own limitations and the strong power of the ruling class.

There is no doubt that the idea of evenness and equality (mainly shown among the farmers’ group) is the product of a small-scale peasant economy. However, under the condition of the natural economy, this thought of averaging the social wealth and arranging the surplus to supplement the deficiency plays an important role in reducing exploitation, preventing annexation, maintaining the basic living condition for the farmers, securing the society and so on. It gave rise to the social cultural psychology of the farmers, fighting against tyranny and demanding equality, and it also promoted the growth of fighting spirit.
As a social mentality, it enriched the awareness of the independent Chinese nation, and transformed into the desire for freedom. However, this idea is marked by absolute egalitarianism, and it is impossible to realize in the world. It does not allow different people or groups to have a better life through exploiting advantage. It emphasizes static balance and sacrifices efficiency and promotion, and it does not encourage dynamic competition, nor encourage people to achieve the improved work and production. In this way, the idea of evenness and equality is, perhaps, inadvisable.

6. Being practical and realistic

Being practical and realistic is one of the basic spirits of Chinese culture. The departure point of Chinese culture is people’s mind and life. It faces reality and emphasizes life. Being practical and realistic is the principle of cognition and moral belief.

Confucius advocated “constant reviewing or practicing of that already studied”, “asking about every uncertainty”, “When you know a thing, to hold that you know it; and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it”, “no foregone conclusions, no arbitrary predeterminations, no obstinacy, and no egoism”, these were all the reflection of the realistic spirit.

Xun Zi disagreed with the idea of “born to know”, and stressed the importance that the knowledge can be acquired through hard work. Dong Zhongshu admitted that “the rich have uninterrupted stretch of land while the poor have no space to stand”, and required “renewal” to loosen penalty and taxes. Wang Chong emphasized on the reality, and rejected the unfounded things.

As for the latter Chen Liang, Ye Shi, Yan Yuan, they all focused on the feat, and stressed unifying motivation and effect. These were the different manifestations of the realistic spirit.

Taoism also had the realistic spirit though they considered “Tao” as “extremely mysterious and abstruse”. Lao Tzu said: “He who knows other men is discerning; he who knows himself is intelligent,” and advocated studying the enemy’s situation and: “There is no greater danger than under-estimating your opponent”.

While Chuang Tzu’s school required one to “analyze the truth of everything in the world” highlighting the discussion between freedom and necessity, and opposed dogmatism. The latter Huang-Lao Taoism’s statement that “things have changed with the passage of time” is another expression of realistic spirit.

Legalism rejected *a priori* knowledge, and emphasized the “participation of practice”. It laid stress on real action, and advocated merits and honors based on the plough and on battle. It attacked prayer and illusion, and stuck to reality. Penalty and admiration were used as instruments to stimulate and limit the passion of the people. It made no attempt to educate through hollow speeches. This is realistic spirit reflected from the standpoint of the utilitarian.
The traditional Chinese study of history insisted on truthful record, and was not afraid of the pressure from power, reflecting again the realistic spirit. The famous historian Liu Zhiji, "reports all the issues, be they good or evil, so that the luxurious emperor and the treacherous officials would feel fear". There was no lack of upright historians who would rather be demoted, exiled, or even lose their lives simply to record historical fact.

The realistic spirit is made manifest through a practical attitude. Chinese people always reject illusion and emphasize reality. They express their will and achieve self-value through quotidian life, human relationships and social political life, opposing unrealistic illusion.

In Chinese cultural history, the power of the emperor was always above the theocratic power. Theocracy served the needs of the crown. This is closely related to the practical spirit of Chinese people. We might even say that the tradition of realism in Chinese classic literature is closely related to the realistic and practical spirit. This kind of spirit is also deeply engrained into the national mentality.

The quality of Chinese people is simple and unadorned. They advocate a down-to-earth attitude and going forward step by step, as in the saying “cross the river by groping the stones”. They despise the showy and insubstantial. These all reflect the outstanding side of Chinese cultural spirit and the quality of the Chinese nation.

However, there are some negative aspects to this spirit. For example, it emphasizes people's mind and life, but ignores the reconstruction and research of nature. For another example, this spirit is always based on experimentalism, paying more attention to practical benefit and the immediate interest. This is clearly the mentality of small farmers. This shows that the practical and realistic spirit tends to ignore long-term interests, and this is inevitably the result of the small peasant economy's own limitation.

7. Being optimistic and open-minded

Chinese culture has the spirit of being optimistic and open-minded.

In Chinese people's eyes, the meaning of life and value of individuals exist in the real world. It is worth celebrating if someone is living a gilded life; while if the official career is full of frustrations, or suffering from sorrows, it is not lamentable. Be proactive and exert oneself constantly, and always have an optimistic mind. Pursue the truth, yearn for the light, and then people's hearts are filled with hope. Personal frustration can be adjusted through the “the troubles [that] chasten ones’ heart so that he would become a great man”, and transform into an optimistic attitude.

If the team is met with troublesome situations, they can be regarded as opportunities, and hard times as the trough between two upsurges. The nation can be recovered through enduring hardships in order to accomplish some ambition. Maxims such as “there are no roads without dangers and difficulties, there are no
things without defeat” and “out of the depth of misfortune comes bliss” express people's firm belief in a promising future. “The roads are devious, while the future is promising”, is the precipitation and transformation of this kind of optimistic spirit.

Chinese classic tragedies always have a happy ending. Though characterized by a utopian daydream, they nevertheless express people's yearning and pursuit of beautiful endings, and hold an optimistic attitude fast to meet with tragedy.

The optimism of the Chinese nation gives birth to an open mind. It appeared as an all-inclusive cultural value. Chinese culture has always connected and mingled with foreign cultures in history. Not only does it influence foreign cultures with its internal characteristics, but it also absorbs and integrates.

In the process of Buddhism's spread towards eastern China, Chinese culture and foreign cultures were living in peace. When they got conflicts, they would be intermingled in the end, and helped each other and developed together.

Islam and Christianity had a similar experience in China. People were familiar with the reconciliation between different components within Chinese culture. Confucianism and Mohism were closely related, and Confucian and Legalism were flowing together, Confucian and Taoism supplemented each other, and Confucianism and Buddhism absorbed the main ideas from each other. Finally, they were merged into one. These examples, throughout the theoretical refining, were expressed as the principle that: “all living creatures grow together without harming one another, just as roads run in parallel without interfering with one another”.

As for the social political life, it advocated that “the differences can supplement each other”, “harmony in diversity”, drew on the wisdom of the masses and chose the right to follow. As for the cultural aspects, “there are thousands of thoughts in the world but they are sourced from the same point, or arrive at the same end by different means or roads”, people should be fully inclusive and equitable, and different things go opposite and yet they are complementary to each other.

This spirit lends Chinese culture a strong ability to adapt and remodel, and gives Chinese people a broad mind and great tolerance, so that Chinese culture might adapt and regenerate. However, there are some negative aspects to this spirit. Concepts like “happiness consists in contentment,” “do not feel the disgrace when being affronted,” “satisfied with poverty and living happily” have permeated throughout the whole society, and lead to a conservative mindset. People would get satisfied with what has been achieved, and made no move towards progress. Chinese people are unaware of crisis when they meet with hidden danger.

Meanwhile, this kind of thought contributes to the compromising mind of Chinese people, preventing prompt action, even though this might mean missing opportunity for the breaking of deadlocks and the progress towards reform.

8. Controlling desire through morality

Another aspect of Chinese culture's basic spirit is controlling desire through morality.
When Chinese society stepped into the civilized world, there was a strong rational spirit permeating the whole process. In Chinese culture, people are rational and moral, but they are not creatures in the biological sense. Everyone has a sense of honesty and honor, and it is the basic content of the subjective mind. The main object of understanding philosophy is the ethic norm. The “extreme kindness” is the highest realm of morality, and it is also the ultimate political dream. Therefore, the satisfaction of an individual’s emotion and desires should meet the social and rational requirement.

Confucianism advocated that one be, “expressive of enjoyment without being licentious, and of grief without being hurtfully excessive,” “hence the superior man returns to the (good) affections (proper to his nature) in order to bring his will into harmony with them” and “a relationship starts with affection, but ends up with morality”.

Taoism considered the satisfaction of the emotion and desire of individuals as detrimental to life and body. Generally speaking, Chinese culture not only opposes the asceticism that denies the emotion and satisfaction of desire, but also the emotion and satisfaction that is expressed by carnalism.

Another expression of the ancient rational spirit is stressing the conformity between individuals and groups and society. On one hand, it fully recognizes the existence of individuals’ sensations and the important values of development. On the other, it strongly advocates that existence and development of individual rational life should be connected with others as well as the existence and development of the whole society. The two aspects should stay in a harmonious relationship and should not split. The great scholar Zhang Zai in the Song dynasty’s Xi Ming expressed this Confucian thought. Xi Ming treated the whole world as one, and advocated that, “all the people are my compatriots and we should share everything with them,” and “the reason why we respect the elders is to respects all the elders among our compatriots; take care of the helpless and poor people is to protect all the helpless poor people…all the people in the world are my brothers that suffer from the hardship and have nobody to vent their grievances, including the old, disabled, lonely people, or the widowers and widows”.

This thought was the same as the Confucian, “in regard to the aged, to give them rest; in regard to friends, to show them sincerity; in regard to the young, to treat them tenderly”. All express the unity of individuals’ life and with society.

While Taoism once pointed criticism on the falsity of virtue and morality, and on limiting individuals’ personalities advocated by Confucianism, they preferred to stress the existence of individuals and the free development, but did not oppose the spirit of kindheartedness. Lao Tzu advocated “a great man never accumulate the wealth, the more he contributes to the public, the more satisfied he would feel, the more he give to others, the richer he will be”. Zhuang Zi’s school not only praised the spirit that people help each other in hardship like “when the springs (supplying the pools) are dried up, the fishes huddle together on the dry land. Than that they should moisten one another there by their gasping, and keep one another
“wet by their milk,” but also eagerly expected people to break away from all sufferings, and live freely like fishes in the river without any troubles.

Mohism’s “universal love” had an ascetic aspect, and also encouraged people to devote themselves to the world and their country. Legalism put satisfaction of personal desire in the first place, but also connected this kind of satisfaction with the contribution that the individuals made for others and their country. Of course, understanding the unity of individuals and society is lower than Confucianism and Mohism, and their influence in Chinese history cannot be compared with the other two trajectories.

In addition, as mentioned above, the sense of responsibility to country and people aligned with the thought, “be the first to worry about the troubles across the land,” and “everyone is responsible for his country,” emphasizing the whole situation and interpersonal relationships.

Evidently, the thought that the satisfaction of individuals’ emotion and desire should meet the sense of society, and the thought of the unity of individuals and the society, are all the specific expression of the thought of controlling desire by morality.

In traditional Chinese culture, regardless of theoretical schools and family background, as the interests of their lives were limited by the ethical and political culture, they all pursue the control of morality. Though people in different times and different positions pursue different connotations of morality, they can all be abstracted as the moral and rational spirit, and become the guideline for action. “Morality” should be the principle of people’s emotion and desire. Emotion does not go against morality, and desire should not exceed morality. This has become the common life attitude.

The formation of this spirit plays a positive role for the Chinese nation, since it emphasizes reasoning, pays attention to moral integrity, and objects to carnalism and naturalism. It also plays an active role in the formation of the typical national spirit and social harmony.

However, in the feudal rulers’ hands, this spirit has become a tool to suppress people’s normal satisfaction of desire and normal personalities. Neo-Confucian theory in the Song dynasty’s “people should keep the natural law and exterminate the human desire” is one of the typical examples, and should be criticized and abandoned.