

History, Values and Path: The Triple Dimension of Promoting the National Spirit

Zidi Jin

Southwest Minzu University, No. 168, Dajian Road, Shuangliu District, Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, China

jinzidi@stu.swun.edu.cn

Abstract. The national spirit, as the full expression of a nation's inner mentality, is an important guarantee for achieving national rejuvenation. Therefore, the promotion of national spirit is a necessary path for the new era. Historically speaking, the national spirit in modern times has gone through stages of initial construction, formation and then development. In terms of values, the promotion of national spirit is of great significance in promoting the development of the Chinese nation, maintaining the unity of all ethnic groups and preserving national independence. In terms of the practical path, the promotion of the national spirit requires not only a clear definition of the connotation and carrier of the national spirit, but also the mobilisation of the youth and the widening of the communication channels of the new media to achieve it.

Keywords: National spirit; Historical examination; Practical path.

1. Introduction

Lu Xun once said, "Only the national spirit is worthy of preciousness, and only when it is carried forward will the Chinese people make real progress." [1]The national spirit developed by the Chinese people during their long struggle and exploration has become the full expression of the inner mentality of the Chinese nation. From the defeat of the first Sino-Japanese War to the victory of the Communist Party of China in leading the nation in the war of resistance, it was the successive exploration of the Chinese national spirit by generations of insightful people in the path of the movement for national independence that led to the founding of New China. In today's multi-polar world, the historical development of the national spirit can help us understand the development process of modern China, and it is important for people to understand and promote the national spirit, as well as to realise the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in the new era and better cope with global challenges.

2. A Historical Examination of the National Spirit

During the first two millennia before the Opium War, China, with its vast territory, long history and culture, and solid comprehensive national power, gained a sense of superiority over other countries and developed a system of political discourse that centred on China and regarded neighbouring countries or peoples outside China as foreigners or even barbarians. In this system, the imperial rulers were "generous with their favours but dominant to the barbarians in all directions". As Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit, who came to China in the late sixteenth century, lamented after seeing the 'complete map of the world' made by Chinese people, "there was no king, dynasty or culture to boast of anywhere else in the world except China, whose vast territory 'actually borders the edge of the universe. " [2]Driven by this arrogance, the feudal dynasties believed that it was an unchanging law of the world that empires would endure, and thus developed the notion of a heavenly empire in their own constructed order of China and the barbarians. However, the Qing dynasty, which appeared to the rulers to be a proud one, had in fact already fallen into a precarious social situation of corrupt officials, economic decline and hardship for the people. Some of the elites living in the upper echelons of society had long recognised that the Chinese nation was showing the spirit of "the old is dying, the time is decaying", and they advocated reform with a sense of concern for the country and the people, pointing their eyes towards the feudal system for a new national spirit. Although the ideas of these

elites failed to create a tidal wave in society, they did set the stage for the budding of the national spirit in modern China.

2.1 The Initial Construction of the National Spirit (1840-1919)

In the mid-18th century, when the Industrial Revolution, which began in Britain, completed the transition from workshop crafts to machine industry and spread rapidly to other European and American countries, the feudal rulers, who were intoxicated by the dream of a heavenly empire, were oblivious to the outside world. After the outbreak of the Opium War, the British ships and cannons broke through China's traditional tribute trade system and the concept of the dynastic system, but this did not prompt the ruling clique to give up their naive illusions of grandeur, so much so that two years after the war, only a few "lone brave men", represented by Wei Yuan, Lin Zexu and Xu Jishe, opened their eyes to the world. They advocated "to fight against the barbarians with the way they attacked us, to treat the barbarians with the way they treated us, and to control the barbarians by learning their skills." [3] This idea was undoubtedly a great shock to the Qing government's conceited adherence of "the kingdom of heaven" and the traditional concept of "emphasising the way rather than the weapon". As a result, these intellectuals at court came under severe criticism from both the court and the public. However, after suffering the double blow of internal and external troubles, the disintegration of the imperial system and the decay of the national spirit led Feng Guifen to utter the long sigh: "Compared with the barbarians, our talents haven't been fully recognized, our land hasn't been fully utilised, the ruler and the people are not fully responsible, and we have indeed fallen behind".[4] In order to cope with the unprecedented changes of the past few thousand years, the Qing government began to explore the road to self-improvement and prosperity in the foreign affairs movement of "learning from and controlling the barbarians". The Qing government's initiative to learn advanced science and technology from the west was undoubtedly a full recognition of its own "inferiority to the west", as well as the reflection of the imperial intellectuals, represented by Zeng Guofan, Li Hongzhang and Zhang Zhidong, on the decline of the national spirit in modern times and their thoughts on reconstructing the national spirit.

The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1894, the destruction of the Beiyang navy and the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki plunged China into an unprecedented national crisis and undid the achievements of the foreign affairs movement, which had taken 30 years of painstaking work. The lucrative profits from Japan's victory over China were gained with "just a few ships"^[5] and fueled the ambitions of other western powers to carve up China. But it was also after the defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War that modern China faced the crisis of national extinction, "evoking the great dream of our country for 4,000 years"^[6]. Many advanced intellectuals went to Japan after the war to find out whether there was a cure behind Japan's success that could save modern China. In 1899, Liang Qichao published *Does the Spirit of China Still Exists*, arguing that the different national destinies of China and Japan stemmed from the two countries' very different national spirits. He pointed out that at the present time, the most important task was "to create a Chinese national spirit. The so-called patriotism and self-love are the spirit of soldiers." ^[7]Liang Qichao summed up the "spirit of China" as "patriotism and self-love", which was a preliminary understanding of the national spirit with patriotism as its core. At the beginning of the 20th century, the magazine *Jiangsu* published an article proposing the term "national spirit", arguing that the rise and fall of a nation is "determined by the strength or weakness of its spirit"[8]. The reason why the western countries were strong was that "they had an incredible national spirit that was as powerful as it was." [9]But domestic society at the time was "corrupt and empty"[10].

Since the ideological rigidity under feudal autocracy and the strong colonisation by imperialism had led to the decline of the modern national spirit, the reconstitution of the modern national spirit and the full awakening of national self-awareness had to be achieved through anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism.^[11]In 1919, China participated in the Paris Peace Conference, but the brutal diplomacy of Japan and other European and American powers at the Conference not only rejected the reasonable demands made by the Chinese delegates at the Conference, but also handed over all German rights

and interests in Shandong to Japan. Prompted by the diplomatic disgrace and national crisis, the May Fourth Movement broke out and the curtain of China's new democratic revolution was raised. As an answer to the question of salvation and survival in modern China, the May Fourth Movement "changed the previous situation in which only conscious revolutionaries but not the awakened masses of the people were struggling, arousing the participation of a wide range of people throughout society, with the working class as the main force, and achieving the first full awakening of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation since the Opium War." [12] This "great awakening" gave a certain shape to the construction of the national spirit in modern China, and also laid the foundation for the entry of Marxism into China.

2.2 The Formation of the National Spirit (1919-1949)

The vigorous development of the May Fourth Movement was also accompanied by the rise of socialist thinking - the Russian Revolution in 1917 sent Marxism to China with a bang. The advanced intellectuals, represented by Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, found an ideological weapon to guide the future direction of China under the baptism of Marxism, and the introduction, study and propagation of Marxism became the mainstream of this later ideological and cultural movement. As Marxism spread widely, on the one hand, the Chinese workers' movement continued to develop and the workers' community was desperate to find a spiritual weapon to realise the will of this community; on the other hand, the propagators of Marxism were also desperate to draw strength from the workers' movement. The activities of the early organisations of the Communist Party of China further contributed to the integration of Marxism with the Chinese workers' movement, and the convening of the First Congress of the Communist Party of China in 1921 announced the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. The birth of the Communist Party of China was in line with the objective requirements of social progress and revolutionary development since modern times. As an independent path of exploration, unlike the struggle of the past to save the nation from peril, it has enriched the Chinese national spirit and brought hope to the long-suffering Chinese society.

The September 18th Incident in 1931 unveiled the curtain of China's war of resistance against Japan, and the anti-Japanese movement in full swing gradually formed an unstoppable torrent in the whole society, and the cohesion and centripetal force of the Chinese national spirit increased as never before. An article pointed out that "for the first time in China's modern history, such a national calamity was taking place, and at the same time it was unprecedented for China to be able to truly mobilise all the armies of the country with national organisations, national consciousness and enthusiasm, in order to save and defend the country." [13] At the critical moment of national crisis, the Chinese Communist Party led the Chinese people righteously onto the path of resistance against the Japanese invasion. In 1935, the Communist Party published the *The Letter to All Compatriots for Resisting Japan and Saving the Country*, stating, "Our country and our people are at a critical juncture of life and death. If we resist the Japanese, we will live; if we do not resist the Japanese, we will die. It has become the sacred duty of every compatriot to resist the Japanese and save the country!" The call was made to "stop the civil war and to concentrate all national strength on the sacred cause of fighting against Japan and saving the country." [14] In September of the following year, the anti-Japanese national united front led by the Communist Party of China was formally formed, and the spiritual strength of the Chinese nation as a whole was mobilised as never before. The spirit of nationalism was also formed in such a high level of national sentiment, and the common national will to "defend against foreign humiliation with one heart" was fully brought into play during this period, ultimately forming a huge synergy for the Chinese nation to resist the Japanese and achieve victory. The victory in the war against Japan profoundly changed the future and destiny of the Chinese nation, and completely altered the spirit of the Chinese nation, which had been scattered in the past.

"The Chinese nation, as a self-conscious national entity, emerged from the confrontation between China and the western powers in the last hundred years; but as a self-contained national entity, it has been shaped by the historical process of several thousand years." [15] The invasion of modern China by the western powers since the Opium Wars made the imperial rulers truly aware of the national

crisis at hand, but why did countless benevolent scholars in modern society try to rethink the construction of a national spirit and write books and speeches with little success in the end? The reason is that although they had progressive ideas and the courage to fight feudal autocracy and imperialism to the end, their appeal for "salvation and survival" and consideration of the national spirit were confined to the level of the gentry and intellectuals in modern Chinese society, and their depth and breadth did not extend to the general public. The spiritual shackles of feudalism and the fierce attacks of the western powers were wearing down the self-confidence and willpower of the people, so modern Chinese society was in dire need of an advanced organisation to mobilise all the people for national independence and liberation. So, with the courage to "dare to be the first in the world", the Communist Party of China relied closely on the people and combined the basic principles of Marxism with Chinese reality, and achieved a great victory in revolutionary construction through great hardship and at great cost. This fundamentally changed the future destiny of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation, and the path of independent exploration led by the Communist Party of China was the process of forming the new Chinese national spirit.

2.3 Refinement and Development of the National Spirit (1949-present)

In 1949, Chairman Mao Zedong solemnly proclaimed to the world from the Tiananmen Tower: "The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China is established today!" The founding of New China ushered in a new era in history, marking the complete end of China's semi-colonial and semi-feudal social history and the complete abolition of a series of unequal treaties imposed on China. "The Chinese people have now risen to their feet" means that the Communist Party of China has led all Chinese people to start a new journey towards a better life, completing the great leap from thousands of years of feudal and authoritarian politics to the mastery of the people, and achieving a high degree of unity and unprecedented solidarity among all nationalities in China. The Chinese people have since taken their destiny firmly into their own hands, becoming the masters of their country, society and their own destiny, and the spirit of the Chinese nation has been transformed. After the founding of the country, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, a vigorous socialist construction movement was launched throughout the country, and by the end of 1956 China's socialist transformation was basically completed, opening the way for comprehensive socialist construction at a later stage.

Since the reform and opening up, the Chinese nation has entered the stage of "getting rich". Deng Xiaoping pointed out: "while building a high level of material civilization, we must improve the scientific culture of the whole nation, develop a noble and colourful cultural life, and build a high level of socialist spiritual civilization."^[16]The strategic position of the construction of spiritual civilisation was emphasised. At the Fourth Plenary Session of the 13th Party Central Committee, Jiang Zemin pointed out that "while building a socialist material civilization, we must at the same time build a socialist spiritual civilization."^[17]Subsequently, in the report of the 16th Party Congress, it was clearly proposed for the first time that "promoting and nurturing the national spirit is an extremely important task in cultural construction, so that the whole people will always maintain an upwardly mobile state of mind."^[18]In 2006, the Sixth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the Party included for the first time "the national spirit with patriotism at its core and the spirit of the times with reform and innovation at its core" as an important part of the core socialist value system.

Since the 18th Party Congress, actively cultivating and practising socialist core values and using the socialist core value system to build social consensus have become the central embodiment of the Chinese spirit in the new era. 2013 General Secretary Xi Jinping first explicitly put forward the "Chinese spirit" at the closing session of the first session of the 12th National People's Congress, and pointed out in the session "The Chinese spirit must be carried forward to realise the Chinese dream. This is the national spirit with patriotism at its core and the spirit of the times with reform and innovation at its core. This spirit is the soul of a cohesive and strong nation."^[19]In 2017, the report of the 19th Party Congress stated, "after a long period of effort, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. It means that the Chinese nation, which has been suffering for a long time since

modern times, has ushered in a great leap from standing up, getting rich to getting strong, and ushered in a bright prospect of achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." [20] In its journey to achieve great rejuvenation, the Chinese nation has continued to move into the centre of the world stage, contributing Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions to human problems, actively participating in global governance and assuming international responsibilities. At the same time, on the basis of inheriting and carrying forward the excellent national spirit, it has also formed a great spirit of creativity, struggle, solidarity and dreaming that echoes the development of the times. In the new era, when the national spirit, the spirit of the times, the core socialist value system, the core socialist values and the spirit of China emerge in the course of the development of contemporary Chinese society, it means that this nation with a long history and a vast territory has finally achieved the return and reinvention of the national spirit after a long period of suffering.

3. The Value Implications of Promoting the National Spirit

The national spirit is the solid backbone of the Chinese nation's self-standing in the world. Promoting the national spirit plays an important role in promoting the continuous progress of the Chinese nation, consolidating the unity and solidarity of all ethnic groups and maintaining the independence of its own nation.

3.1 The National Spirit is the Spiritual Driving Force Behind the Development of the Chinese Nation

The spirit of nationalism, as a spiritual driving force for the survival of the nation, is linked to the internal and external crisis of the Chinese nation in modern times. "After the outbreak of the *September 18th Incident*, the national crisis deepened, and a wave of social thinking gradually emerged in favour of the Chinese national spirit among the educated. The fourteen years of hardship in the war led to an upsurge in the great national spirit, with patriotism at its core, which inspired national cohesion and created the conditions for national independence. Since the founding of New China, the continuous development of China's political system has created a solid foundation for the perfection of the national spirit and the realisation of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. This spirit has the function of guiding people's political behaviour, forming political identity and increasing the centripetal force of the Chinese nation. It can not only provide an important ideological basis and spiritual support for the construction of the country's political civilisation and shape people's values, but also provide new ideas for the construction of the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics; in addition to this, the national spirit has also created a good environment for China's peaceful development in the journey towards the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The path of peaceful development is the inheritance and development of the excellent cultural traditions of the Chinese nation, and is also the inevitable conclusion drawn by the Chinese people from their bitter experiences since the modern era. China in the new era has always held high the banner of multilateralism, adhered to the road of peaceful development, adhered to the concept of "community with a shared destiny", replaced confrontation with cooperation, replaced zero-sum games with win-win situation, actively participated in international affairs, demonstrated its role as a great power in the global governance system, and escorted the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

3.2 The National Spirit is the Spiritual Bond that Coordinates the Unity and Solidarity of all Ethnic Groups

The national spirit, as the bond that coordinates the unity and development of all ethnic groups, is always close to the people of all ethnic groups. The wisdom of "seeking common ground while preserving differences and accepting all", which is embedded in traditional Chinese culture, has become the basis for the development of national unity and an important factor in building a common spiritual home for the Chinese people. Even though the historical period between the Central Plains and the ethnic minority regions has been characterised by uneven economic development and

conflicts. But it was only through thousands of years of regime change that the various ethnic groups gradually moved from conflict to integration, from disagreement to unity, colliding in brilliant cultural sparks and eventually forming a close relationship of solidarity, together creating a unified multi-ethnic nation. In modern China, from a few dozen party members to the establishment of a new China, from poverty and weakness to prosperity, from closed and backward to the world center, this is not only a miracle created by the Communist Party of China, but also a miracle created by the unity of the people of all ethnic groups. Faced with the sudden onset of the new pandemic in the 21st century, the people of all ethnic groups across the country took practical action to prove that "when the people are united, the hardships will be overcome". Medical workers bravely went against the odds to save the sick with love; media practitioners went into the field to deliver messages with fearlessness; and ordinary people strictly abided by orders to fight the virus with rationality. The unity of the Chinese people of all races has brought the pandemic under stable control, resulting in a day of hope. Therefore, whether in the past, the present or the future, the national spirit is an important guarantee to unite society and promote the prosperity of all ethnic groups.

3.3 The National Spirit is the Spiritual Pillar That Keeps the Nation Independent

As the spiritual pillar that drives the continuous progress of the Chinese nation, the national spirit is in tune with the trend of the times in social development. Economic globalisation and political multipolarity have exposed the global society of the 21st century to complexity and uncertainty, which has both enhanced the interdependence of sovereign states and brought about competition and challenges to the development of various nationalities. The game between countries is not only a contest of political and economic discourse, but also a confrontation of national soft power. In response to the hegemony and power politics practised by some western countries today, and the export of the so-called "human rights" and "democracy" concepts to the outside world, the above-mentioned practices of western countries are nothing but a moral excuse to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. General Secretary Xi once said, "If we do not have our own spiritual independence, then our political, ideological, cultural and institutional independence will be drained from the bottom." [21] As an important part of a country's cultural soft power, national spirit plays a pivotal role in maintaining national independence, enhancing people's sense of identity and belonging, effectively resisting the strong implantation of western cultural values, and promoting the construction of socialist material and spiritual civilisation.

4. A Practical Path to Promote the National Spirit in the New Era

The national spirit is the soul of the Chinese nation. With the mutual stirring of various ideologies and cultures under the trend of multi-polarity, and in the face of the major task of achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, every Chinese has the obligation to carry forward the national spirit and to unite their efforts to achieve national prosperity, national revitalisation and people's happiness.

4.1 Clarifying the Core of the National Spirit

To promote the national spirit, it is essential to clarify the profound connotation of it. Over the course of more than 5,000 years of human social development, the Chinese nation has developed a great national spirit of unity, peace-loving, hard work, courage and self-improvement, with patriotism at its core. Patriotism has been in the bloodline of the Chinese nation since ancient times. Literary figures from all generations have put the magnificent mountains and rivers and the long lineage of literature into their writing and passed them on to future generations; pioneering fighters have fought bravely for the rejuvenation and rise of the nation; in the age of waste and rejuvenation, the forefathers of scientific research plunged into the Gobi, withstanding the scorching sands and remaining anonymous for decades, to armour and cast shields for the cause of China's strong army; the nameless anti-narcotics police officers walked on the tip of the sword, shuttling through the fierce fire of vicious

criminals to fight for the cause of China's strong army. The pandemic is rampant, and those who are determined to fight against it go to the front line from all corners of the country, facing life and death and the unknown, holding up the backbone of well-being for all the people. The Chinese sons and daughters have the courage and determination to do so because they have long had family feeling in their bones and blood and a sense of nationalism in their hearts. They have integrated their small selves into their larger selves and their patriotic zeal has become the most noble and profound core of the national spirit. Therefore, no matter how times evolve or how the social context changes, "patriotism" will remain in the national spirit and become the innate instinct of every new generation of people.

4.2 Constructing a Vehicle for the National Spirit

The national spirit is an ideological concept, but the expression and manifestation of this spirit is transmitted in material terms. Therefore, the promotion of the national spirit requires the construction of a carrier for it. Among the many world heritage sites in China, there is also a value of national spirit. The Great Wall, a legend of the Chinese nation, is a monument to the long material civilisation of the country and the nation, and bears witness to the new journey of the Chinese nation. As a symbol of the great unity of the Chinese nation, the Great Wall is an expression of strength, courage and power for all Chinese sons and daughters, representing the resilient character of the Chinese nation. In particular, the Great Wall became a symbol of the Chinese nation during the struggle against Japanese imperialism, a time of life and death for the Chinese nation. In addition, the "March of the Volunteer Army", which was composed during the anti-Japanese Salvation Movement, later became the national anthem of the People's Republic of China, and when people listen to it, they can always feel the enthusiasm of all Chinese sons and daughters in the war years for "living and dying for the sake of the country". The Great Wall has long been an indomitable, indestructible and indestructible national spirit.

4.3 Utilizing the Main Role of Youth Groups

To promote the national spirit, the main role of the youth group must be brought into play. "Youth is the most active and vibrant force in the entire social force. The hope of the country lies in the youth, and the future of the nation lies in the youth." [22] In just a few decades, China has gone from being a backward agricultural country to becoming a major force in the international community today, thanks to the creative efforts of its youth. As the saying goes, "when the youth are strong, the nation will be strong." Some young people were busy in the launch centre of the Chang'e 4 lunar exploration project; Huawei's successful development of 5G technology was backed by the efforts of a group of dynamic young talents; the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge took seven years to complete, reflecting the superb strain of China's young engineers. The great achievements pioneered by generations of young tide makers in different fields are the pivot of the national spirit, inspiring the Chinese nation to carry on and develop for thousands of years. As the pillars of the nation, understanding and accepting the profound history and culture of the motherland and adhering to the Chinese cultural gene is an important condition for the cultivation and development of the national spirit of young people. On this basis, young people must not stop at slogans to promote the national spirit, but must have the foresight to think of danger in times of peace and to link their ideals to the future of their country and their lives to the destiny of the nation. As young Chinese in the new era, if they can revisit the bloodthirsty history of the revolution and carry forward the spirit of the times of self-improvement, they will be able to illuminate the great journey with the light of revival and create great miracles with determination. They will be able to write the song of youth in our deep connection with the motherland and carry forward the Chinese style in the backwaters of the times.

4.4 Broadening the Dissemination Channels of Self-media

To promote the national spirit, the dissemination channels of self-media should be continuously widened. With the popularity of the internet in society and the rapid development of big data

intelligent platforms, the emergence of new media, mainly represented by short videos, has received widespread attention from the nation in recent years. The use of the technical support and innovative path of self-media to promote the Chinese national spirit and tell the Chinese story has become a necessary path in the information age. The rapidity and efficiency of self-media communication can reduce aesthetic fatigue in the process of learning to pass on and promote the national spirit[23], making the rich content of the Chinese national spirit more familiar to the public, and also enabling the public to understand more intuitively the importance of "internalising the national spirit in the heart and externalising it in action" in the new era. In addition, the real-time interactivity and diversity of new media to promote the Chinese national spirit has changed the one-way communication mode of traditional media, which allows the public to interact with the "national spirit" or mainstream social issues in both directions and actively participate in them to promote the construction of democracy. However, in recent years, *Kuaishou* and *Headlines* have taken a "technology-neutral" stance, ignoring the authenticity and objectivity of information dissemination, which is not the proper attitude of online platforms. Therefore, the operators of self-published media should not only strengthen their own awareness of regulation and firmly establish the right values, but also continuously improve their business literacy. Furthermore, they need to actively guide the people to participate in the task of promoting the national spirit through forms that are pleasing to the public. In addition, the self-publishing media must continue to expand the depth and breadth of its communication so that more people can understand the profound essence of the Chinese national spirit, in order not to deviate from the initial beautiful vision.

5. Conclusion

Since the modern era, generations of pioneers and fighters have marched forward with the fire of hope in their hands. They have formed a great national spirit in the process of achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and fighting for national independence, and this spirit is the confidence and courage that constantly inspires and leads the Chinese nation to stride forward with its head held high. "When a man has made his stride, his country will rise up." [24] Having stepped out of the context of national peril, life and death tests, and having passed the historical intersection of the "two centenary goals", the people of China in the new era still bear the historical mission. In the process of actively participating in the global governance system and comprehensively promoting the construction of socialist modernisation, China not only needs to maintain its own national independence, but also needs every Chinese sons and daughters to inherit and carry forward the national spirit, so that the national spirit can always provide spiritual guidance to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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