What Cultural Values Helped Chinese to Combat the COVID-19 Epidemic?

Keqian Xu [1]

[1] PhD., Professor, School of Literature and Journalism, Sanjiang University & School of Chinese Literature and Culture, Nanjing Normal University, China.

Abstract

It is an undeniable fact that China has basically succeeded in controlling the spread of the epidemic in China in the first half of 2020. Behind this success there may be several reasons, among which the cultural factors have certainly played an important role. What kind of cultural values helped Chinese to combat the COVID-19 Epidemic? This paper attempts to discuss this issue by analysing some data from the newly released results in Wave 7 of the World Values Survey and combining with the study of Chinese cultural concepts. It finds that, generally speaking, Chinese culture is characterized with the following cultural spirits and values which are relevant to Chinese people's responding to the crisis of COVID-19 outbreak: the value of the supremacy of human life, believe in science rather than religion, the preference of the value of security over the value of freedom, the idea that the fate of an individual is inextricably linked to that of a group, nation, and humanity, and the spirit of trust and obedience to political leadership. At a time when humanity need to unite in the face of a major disaster such as the Covid-19 pandemic, these Chinese cultural values clearly have some advantages that deserve to be summarized and studied.

Keywords: Chinese culture; Values; *World Value Survey*; COVID-19; Security; Freedom; Social governance

Introduction

The year 2020 will surely go down in history as an extraordinary year in which mankind was confronted with the severe challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic and fought with it arduously and brilliantly. Although China is the earliest country that has encountered the sudden outbreak of this novel corona-virus attack, it has performed very excellent in fighting the pandemic of this disease. The number of confirmed cases in China has fallen rapidly since February 2020. Afterwards, there have been only some imported cases and very limited occasional and scattered domestic cases, and whenever they had been found, they would be effectively controlled. After a year, in Wuhan, the earliest epidemic centre of the disease, as well as in most parts of China, social life and economic activities have basically returned to normal. In fact, China becomes the only major economy that can realize a positive economic growth in 2020 (Hukeri 2020).

In contrast to this, the medical systems and general public in many other parts of the world, especially those in the Americas and Europa, the situation became much worse and even out of control around the end of 2020. According to the data released by WHO, till the last day of 2020, there have been 81,159,096 confirmed cases of COVID-19 globally, including 1,791,246 deaths. Although with the development of vaccines, we are seeing the dawn and believe that humans will eventually overcome the virus, the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has nevertheless left many questions for people to retrospect and reflect on, including what are the roles played by different cultural factors, such as ideas, values, ways of individual behaviour and social governance etc., in different societies in combating the pandemic. As some scholars have pointed out, we human beings are both biological and cultural beings, cultural factors definitely play an important role in our fighting against the disease and containing the pandemic (Orbann and Eric 2020). "One of the key lessons for a global response to a pandemic is that the cultural logic of different societies shapes and influences their prevention strategies."(Airhihenbuwa et.al 2020)

A number of studies have discussed the role of cultural factors in combating the pandemic in different regions (Biddlestone et. al.,2020; Perry et al.,2020; Kay and Wood 2020; Huynh 2020), including some papers specially addressed the situation in China (Cao et al., 2020; Wu 2020; Han 2020). There are many reasons for China's success in combating the COVID-19 pandemic, while culture is obviously one important factor that should not to

be ignored. During the period of fighting against the pandemic of COVID-19, the Oriental cultural spirit represented by Chinese culture obviously showed some advantages and merits, which are worth studying and summarizing. Currently the studies on the role played by Chinese cultural factors in fighting against the pandemic is still quite limited, and some of them are limited to theoretical inferences and lack of data support, others stick to the stereotypical sociologist framework of binary opposites of tight culture-loose culture, individualism-collectivism, and lack of comprehension of the profound historical origin of Chinese culture. This paper attempts to use the relevant data from the *World Values Survey* (Inglehart et al.2020), combined with the discussion of some basic cultural ideas and concepts in the Confucian and Taoist traditions that had the most profound impact on Chinese culture, to make some specific analysis on the cultural factors that have helped Chinese people in their combating the COVID-19 pandemic. The statistics in the tables and text of this paper are taken from the Seventh Wave database of World Values Survey unless otherwise stated. Since this paper mainly compares Chinese culture with western culture, only data of some major Western countries are selected in the table for comparison. As for which countries to select, it may depend on the availability of the data of those countries in that specific questions.

1. The value of putting human life first

The mainstream ancient Chinese culture has a long tradition of putting human life at the top priority. This tradition can be traced back to the Spring-Autumn and Warring States Period when the early thinking trend of rationalism and humanism of the Pre-Qin scholars emerged. Both the early Confucian and Daoist doctrines value human life in this world more than anything else. It is said in *The Book of Change* (*I Ching*) that "The great attribute of Heaven and Earth is giving and maintaining life."(Legge 1963:381) So there is a famous Chinese proverb: "human life is a matter related to Heaven." It means that when things involve people's life and death happen, the top priority must give to the consideration of saving people's life. Confucianism is basically a humanistic ideology which take "*Ren*"(humanity, benevolence) as the most important principle of its doctrine. That is why the *Analects of Confucius* recorded an anecdote that when Confucius's stable was on fire, his only concern was if any human being there was hurt, without mention his horses at all (Lau 1983:92-93). Although Confucianism sometimes has been understood by outsiders as a kind of religion or quasi religion, it is actually not, because it emphasizes too much on the happiness of secular life in this world. The so called "five happiness" mentioned in one of the earliest Confucian classics, the *Book of Documents* (*Shang Shu*) are: longevity, riches, a healthy and undisturbed life, love of virtue, and complete a peaceful due life at the end (Legge 1992:343). Daoism also has a tradition of emphasizing the value of human life, Zhuang Zi and other Daoist representatives usually consider the value of individual live more important than anything else under the heaven, even the emperor's crown. Daoism has developed into a kind of religion in later generations, but this religion, may be the only one, is dedicated to the pursuit of immortality in the real world, rather than leading people to place their hopes in the afterlife or in heaven.

Emphasizing the value of life is a universal value, yet there are some subtle nuances in the specific meaning of "life". In the case of Chinese traditional culture, the focus of "life" is more on the survival of physical life and the continuation of family blood in this real world. The World Value Survey does not ask questions about how the value of life compares with other values, but it does include some questions that may prove that Chinese people pay more attention to the value of human life in this world. For instance, when response to the number Q166 question: if you believe life after death? Only 11.5% Chinese say "Yes", 87.9% Chinese say "No". Among all 72 countries and regions, China had the lowest proportion of respondents who believed in life after death and the highest proportion who did not. Table 1 compares the results of China's survey on this issue with those of some other relevant countries.

	China	Australia	France	Germany	Italy	Japan	United Kingdom	United States
Yes	11.5	53.8	41.2	38.8	49.4	32.2	41.7	68.2
No	87.9	43.6	47.6	50.5	29.7	34.7	57.1	28.4
Don´t know	0.2	-	10.9	9.3	19.4	32.6	1.2	0.2
No answer	0.5	2.6	0.3	1.4	1.5	0.4	0	3.2
(N)	**3.036**	**1.813**	**1.88**	**1.528**	**2.282**	**1.353**	**1.794**	**2.596**

Table 1. WVS Wave7: Q166: Believe in: life after death (Inglehart et al.2020)

The responses to this question indicate that the Chinese people comparatively place more importance on the meaning of life in the real world, and least on the afterlife or heaven. But confusingly, the belief in the afterlife and the world of ghosts and spirits is actually a general premise in many Chinese folklore and customs, which contrasts sharply with the findings of the above survey. One possible explanation is that, the meanings of life after death and the world of ghosts and spirits in Chinese culture are mainly literary, ritualistic, and symbolic, rather than that of true religious beliefs. Even though some folk rituals are based on the assumption of life after death and the existence of the world of ghosts and spirits, their focus is still on the well-being of the living in this life. As

Confucius said, "How can one know death without knowing life?"(Lau 1983:98-99) Emphasizing the value of life, and the safety and happiness of the present living is still the key to understand Chinese secular culture, as a Chinese saying goes: "a bad life is better that a good death". This is one of the reasons why euthanasia is not easily accepted by majority of Chinese people. This is also in line with the secular humanist rationality of ancient Confucianism and the thought of "emphasizing the value of life" of early Taoism.

This value can explain why after an event such as the COVID-19 epidemic that endangers people's life and health broke out and was clearly confirmed, the whole Chinese society can soon have reached a consensus that strict measures must be taken at all costs to put saving and protecting people's life and health in the first place in all work. This is exactly what happened in China in January 2020, when the second expert group sent by the Chinese government went to Wuhan and confirmed that the novel coronavirus is a highly harmful virus that is transmissible from person to person. The central government immediately

issued a directive that governments at all levels must take the health and safety of the people as their top priority, and make every effort to save lives, prevent and control the epidemic, even at the cost of production stoppings and economic decline.

2. Believe in science rather than in religion

Traditional Chinese culture is often criticized for lacking of scientific spirit. It is true that modern science was not first developed in China, although there were many technological inventions in ancient China. This led Joseph Needham, the British scholar and author of *Science and Civilisation in China*, to ask the famous "Joseph Needham question": Although ancient China made many important contributions to the development of science and technology, why didn't the scientific and industrial revolution take place in modern China? The answers to this question are varied and complex. Some put the blame on Chinese culture itself, arguing that it is traditional Chinese culture, represented by Confucianism and Taoism, that holds back the development of science (Gong 2012). Others don't agree with this kind of opinion (Xu 2012; Su and Cheng 2012). My view is that, although there might not be substantial scientific ideas or concepts in the teachings of traditional Confucianism or Daoism, the Confucian or Daoist traditions are not at all against scientific spirit. Confucianism takes a realistic and practical attitude towards things, advocates respect for truth and facts. Daoism emphasizes the "nature" of everything and advocates following the objective "Dao". These realistic and rationalistic attitudes not only do not contradict the scientific spirit, but also have prepared good cultural soil for accepting science. In fact, there has not been serious contradiction or conflict between modern science and traditional Confucianism and Taoism. Therefore, when China entered the modern society, the modern scientific spirit imported from the West has been well accepted in Chinese culture. After the "May 4th Movement", the spirits of Western science and democracy have been spread to China and widely accepted, which was called "Mr. Sci" and "Mr. De" by Chinese people. Although the story of the so-called "Mr. De" in China is a bit complicated, "Mr. Sci" has long been well adopted and popular in China. Any anti-science view in contemporary China tends to be seen as politically incorrect.

The general pro-science attitude of modern Chinese culture is well demonstrated in the World Value Survey. For instance, when asked if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statements that "Whenever science and religion conflict, religion is always right" (Q169), only 1.2% Chinese respondents "strongly agree", only 3.5 Chinese respondents "agree", while the rates of those "strongly disagree" and "disagree" are 48.5% and 45.9% respectively. Among all 49 countries and regions that answered this question, the rate of Chinese respondents who "strongly agree" or "agree" the pro-religion position is the second lowest, just slightly higher than Japanese. While the rate of Chinese respondents who "strongly disagree" plus those who "disagree" this position is the highest among all the countries and regions available in this question (see Table 2).

	China	Australia	Brazil	Germany	Iran	Japan	Mexico	United States
Strongly agree	1.2	5	11.4	3.5	18.9	0.7	13.1	13.1
Agree	3.5	9.2	23.3	6	31.8	2.1	25.6	20.3
Disagree	45.9	39.4	45.1	36.5	22.2	41.2	39.1	37.3
Strongly disagree	48.5	44.5	9.2	48.5	6.5	25.1	19.7	26.5
Don´t know	0.1	0	9.5	5.1	19.7	30.5	2.4	0.1
No answer	0.8	2	1.4	0.4	0.8	0.6	0	2.6
(N)	**3.036**	**1.813**	**1.762**	**1.528**	**1.499**	**1.353**	**1.739**	**2.596**

Table 2. WVS Wave7: Q169: Whenever science and religion conflict, religion is always right (Inglehart et al.2020)

Similarly, when asked the question of if you agree or disagree the statement that "Science and technology are making our lives healthier, easier, and more comfortable" (Q158), the rate of Chinese respondents who gave a positive answer is also obviously higher than most of the other major countries involved in this questionnaire, with a mean value of 8.63, which is higher than most of the other major countries, and a Std Dev. of only 1.7, which is also rather small. This suggests that Chinese people today in general believe more in science, and have a more positive attitude towards science than people in other countries do.

As a result, scientists, including medical experts are highly respected and trusted in China. Especially when the disaster such the pandemic happens, the voice of Chinese real specialists, including respiratory specialists, infectious disease specialists and doctors have a very higher authority in media and society. Their words carry more weight than even the government leaders. It was only after a team of experts led by Dr. Zhong Nanshan, the country's top respiratory disease expert, went to Wuhan for investigation, confirmed the danger of human-to-human transmission of the novel coronavirus and reported to the central government, that the central government made a prompt decision and took decisive measures to launch the national anti-epidemic deployment. It was following the advice of infectious disease experts that the central government made the unprecedented decision to lockdown the epidemic centre Wuhan, a metropolis of more than 10 million people, and impose the most severe quarantine measures in early 2020 during the traditional Chinese spring festival. During this period, the most widely circulated information on Chinese social media was the speeches of several famous medical experts, including Zhong Nanshan, a respiratory disease expert in Guangdong province, Li Lanjuan, an infectious disease expert in Hangzhou, Zhang Wenhong, director of the Department of Infectious Diseases at Huashan Hospital in Shanghai, and Gao Fu, director of the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in Beijing. Their scientific guidance played a great role in preventing the spreading of the novel Coronavirus. They are regarded as heroes by most Chinese people. Some pulls and studies in America shows that people who were more religious were more likely to distrust scientific guidelines and less likely take recommended precautionary measures during the pandemic (Burge 2020). The Chinese people, since they have relatively indifferent religious views, are apt to follow the opinions of scientists and actively cooperate with various prevention and control measures. This is also one of the important cultural factors for China's success in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Security is more important than freedom

"Freedom" is the highest value in modern Western society and culture that has been raised to a hyperbolized degree. Although there have been various or even opposite explanations about what "freedom" really means in western philosophy and culture, yet it is only the word "freedom" itself is enough to arouse a strong ideological and emotional reaction in contemporary western societies. Anything that is considered contrary to "freedom" will be severely condemned and criticized. Any move that is suspected of limiting people's freedom is denounced as politically incorrect and fiercely resisted. Contrastingly, as I have elaborated in another paper, "freedom" has never been the highest priority value in traditional Chinese culture. This is not to say that Chinese culture does not value freedom at all, or that Chinese people do not want freedom, but that the value of freedom is not always given absolute priority in comparison with some other important values. In my opinion, the most important value in Chinese culture is "*ping an*平安" (peace and security). No matter from the Confucian or Taoist classics, we can see that the highest social ideal in traditional Chinese culture is nothing more than the great governance of the world, prosperity of the country and the people, harmony of neighbours, happiness of family, good health and a peaceful life. All of these boil down to the word "*ping an* "(Xu 2015). Such deep-rooted traditional values continue to the present day, which makes most Chinese cherish the overall order and security of the society, and in order to maintain the overall order and security of the society, they would rather sacrifice a little personal freedom.

This Chinese cultural value is also clearly shown in the World Values Survey. When asked the question: "Freedom and Security-which more important?" (Q150) Only 7.1% Chinese respondent prefer "freedom", while 92.7% Chinese respondent prefer "security". Of all 49 countries and territories surveyed, China ranked second only to Indonesia in choosing "security" as the top priority. This is in sharp contrast to the results of several major Western countries surveyed, particularly the United States (see Table 3).

	China	Australia	Germany	New Zealand	United States
Freedom	7.1	51.2	43.2	47.3	69.5
Security	92.7	46.5	53.4	42	28.3
Don´t know	0	0	2.4	7.9	0
No answer	0.2	2.4	1	0	2.2
Missing; Not available	0	0	0	2.7	0
(N)	3.036	1.813	1.528	1.057	2.596

Table 3. WVS Wave7: Q150: Freedom and security - Which more important? (Inglehart et al.2020)

Similarly，in responding Q154 question: If you had to choose, which one of the things on this card would you say is most important? There are 4 options: Maintaining order in the nation, giving people more say in important government decisions, fighting rising prices, protecting freedom of speech. 44.2% Chinese respondents' choice is "Maintaining order in the nation", 33.3% Chinese respondents' choice is "Fighting rising prices". Those who chose "Giving people more say in important government decisions" and "Protecting freedom of speech" were comparatively less. The results also contrast sharply with those of some Western powers (see Table 4).

	China	Australia	France	Germany	Italy	United Kingdom	United States
Maintaining order in the nation	44.2	27.7	30	24.1	24.5	25.3	36.2
Giving people more say in important government decisions	15.7	32.8	25	34.5	22.8	31.9	26.4
Fighting rising prices	33.3	22.1	21.7	6.3	31.5	14.4	11.9
Protecting freedom of speech	4.8	16.4	21.9	33.4	19.4	27.3	24.4
Don´t know	0	0	1.1	1.2	1.3	1	0
No answer	2	1	0.2	0.4	0.5	0	1
(N)	3.036	1.813	1.88	1.528	2.282	1.794	2.596

Table 4. WVS Wave7: Q154: Aims of respondent: first choice (Inglehart et al.2020)

Chinese respondents' responses to questions Q196-Q198 also indicate that more Chinese people think that it is acceptable to sacrifice some individual freedoms in order to ensure the general safety of society. These questions ask the respondents if they think the government of their country should or should not has the right to keep people under video surveillance, or to monitor all e-mails and any other information exchanged on the Internet, or to collect information about anyone living in the country without their knowledge. The rates of Chinese respondents who likely to accept that the government should have the right to do so are significantly higher than that in the major western countries. This shows that, compared with western countries, more people in China think that the government should give higher priority to maintain social security. And for the sake of social security, people can cede more rights and privacy to the government.

During the pandemic of COVID-19, in order to effectively control the spread of the virus, people's freedom of travel and activities have to be restricted to a certain degree. Government agencies even use wireless communication big data to track individuals' movements, granting each individual a health QR code based on that. Actually in this extraordinary period, governments and general public are all facing the dilemma: either to adopt more stringent control measures that restrict people's freedom for the sake of public health and safety, or to allow the epidemic to spread without restricting freedom. China's choice is the former. This is not only because the Chinese government has absolute authority over national governance, but also because it is a natural choice by Chinese culture itself. Some people did have complains during the lockdown period, but in general most Chinese people thought it is worth-while and necessary to sacrifice some freedom of movement in order to save lives and maintain the overall safety and health of society. Many Chinese people are confused and incomprehensible when they see news reports and TV shows that, even though the epidemic is getting worse in some Western countries, there are still many people who are demonstrating in the streets against strict measures to prevent and control the disease, and even refusing to accept the request to wear masks. This vividly illustrates the cultural differences between Chinese and Western cultures on the dilemma between freedom and security.

Ironically, a year later, when the Chinese people in the earliest epidemic center, where strict control measures had been taken to restrict freedom, have basically restored to normal life and can enjoy freedom again, some Western countries who takes freedom as the priority value and failed to take strict control measures earlier are facing an even worse situation, and have to consider to impose stricter lockdown measures to restrict people's freedom. This just confirms a principle of traditional Chinese philosophy: when things go to extremes, they will turn to the opposite direction. Excessively emphasis on the value of freedom may in turn lead to losing freedom at all.

4. The value that an individual is linked to the destiny of the collective, the nation, and all human beings

Studies of some scholars suggest that promoting collectivism may be a way to increase engagement with efforts to reduce the spreading pf COVID-19 (Biddlestone et al., 2020) Many cross-cultural comparative studies believe that Chinese culture emphasizes collectivism rather than individualism, which is also one of the commonly recognized main differences between Chinese and Western cultures (Hofstede 2008:209-278). China is frequently criticized by some westerners as a totalitarian society which emphasizes the holistic interests while neglects the individual rights. However, this view is also controversial, because there are also people who think that the Chinese people are quite disunited, just like "a heap of loose sand" (Tang 2020:141-141). There is also a stereotype that Chinese people are more family oriented, i.e., they attach more importance to the interests of their family as a whole rather than to their own individual interests. But the data from the World Values Survey do not seem to support this argument. When responding the question of the importance of family in life (Q1), 86.2% Chinese respondents chose the option of "very important". But this rate is not any higher than other countries and regions, it is lower than the total rate which is 89.4%, it is also lower than some western countries, such as USA (89.3%), United Kingdom (90.7%), Germany (88.0%), Australia (90.2%), etc. This indicates that family in Chinese people's mind is not necessarily more important than it is in the mind of people of other countries. Questions 255-259 asked

interviewees about their sense of belonging and how close they felt to their communities, provinces, countries, continents and even the whole world. The results do not provide significant data showing that Chinese people have higher closeness at any level comparing to people from other countries and regions.

At the same time, when asked the question of "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?"(Q57). 63.5% Chinese respondents said "Most people can be trusted", 35.7% Chinese respondents say "Need to be very careful". This is in contrast to the surveys in some Western countries, where more people chose the latter over the former (see chart 5). This may indicate that in these western societies, the relationship among people is relatively distant, there is more estrangement between each other, and trust between people is not high. In contrast, in Chinese society, interpersonal relationship may be more harmonious and there is more affinity between people in general.

	China	Australia	France	Germany	Italy	United Kingdom	United States
Most people can be trusted	63.5	48.5	26.3	44.6	26.6	40.2	37
Need to be very careful	35.7	50.6	72.3	52.4	71.3	59.3	62.5
Don´t know	0	0	1.4	2	1.6	0.5	0
No answer	0.8	0.8	0.1	1	0.6	0	0.4
(N)	3.036	1.813	1.88	1.528	2.282	1.794	2.596

Table 5. WVS Wave7: Q57: Most people can be trusted (Inglehart et al.2020)

In my view, it may be too simplistic to characterize interpersonal relationship in Chinese society and culture by the binary opposition of individualism-collectivism. In fact, the traditional Confucianism views the relationship between the individual and the human group from a compatible rather than antagonistic point of view. Confucius, Mencius and Xun Zi all emphasized that human beings are a kind of social and community existence, and it is impossible for human beings to survive without living in groups. It is in groups that individuals get their self-development and perfection. On the one hand, the growth and prosperity of the group cannot be separated from the contribution of the individuals; on the other hand, the strength of the group provides better conditions and guarantees for the free development of individuals. As a Chinese folk saying goes: "what's in the pot, what's in the bowl." The mainstream traditional Chinese culture views the relationship between the individual and the family, the community, the country and even the whole human kind as both differentiated and also linked by common destiny. Therefore, it can be said that the relationship between individuals and groups in Chinese culture is neither pure individualistic nor absolute collectivist, but a compatible relationship between individuals and collectives.

To say that the Chinese people is like "a heap of loose sand" at ordinary times, means that in a peaceful and normal situation, people focus on their own business and development, enjoy their individual freedom, or even stay away from each other all their lives. However, once a major disaster or crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic occurs, and the interests of the community and the nation are greatly threatened, the Chinese people will soon unite and act together. Chinese people understand that the gain and loss of the group is closely related to each individual, and it is difficult for an individual to be spared when the interests of the group are damaged. Therefore, when one place is in trouble, all the other parts will come to rescue. Under this situation, the collectivism and patriotism of the Chinese people will be greatly mobilized.

Thanks to such a common value, when the news of novel coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan came out in early 2020, the whole Chinese people could be quickly mobilized and united to fight the disaster together. Thousands of medical workers from all over the country volunteered to form teams, went to Wuhan and Hubei provinces to provide help. Chinese people around the world were also buying masks, protective materials and related medical equipment to send to the worst-hit areas. During this special time, the vast majority of Chinese people quite comprehend and actively cooperated with the strict prevention and control measures. As a result, there was little resistance to the strict lockdown measures during that period. The streets of many cities with population of millions or even tens of millions can become almost empty overnight after the staying-home order was issued. Although this has brought many inconveniences and difficulties to people's lives, most people can understand that such strict control measures are necessary, and every individual's fate is closely linked to the whole community at this critical moment.

It is also just based on this kind of value, some Chinese experts soberly warn that the end of the COVID-19 pandemic would depend not on how well we did, but on how well different parts of the world did. Chinese experts immediately published the gene sequencing information about the virus, and shared their experience in fighting the epidemic with their counterparts around the world. China has also sent experts to foreign countries and regions to provide medical and material assistance to the best of their ability. The President Xi Jinping of China also announced very early that if a vaccine is successfully developed in China, it will be provided as a global product and used by any country in need. This is fully consistent with the concept of building a community with a shared destiny for mankind put forward by the Chinese leader. It also completely conforms to the concept of the relationship between the individual and the group, the part and the whole in Chinese traditional philosophy.

5．Confidence in the leadership of central government

The reason why China has achieved remarkable results in the fighting against the epidemic is inseparable from the strong leadership of the Chinese government led by Chinese Communist Party. And all of this, in turn, depends on the Chinese people's trust, support and obedience to the leadership of the central government. Data from the World Values Survey also show that Chinese people have much more confidence in their central government than in any other countries. In answering the question of how much confidence you have in the government in your nation's capital (Q71), 47.6% of the Chinese respondents selected "A great deal", 47% of them selected "Quite a lot". Putting these two together means that more than 94% Chinese people have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence to their central government. This rate is the highest among all the 78 countries and regions available in the results of this question. And it is in sharp contrast to the situation of some Western powers (see table 6)

	China	Australia	France	Germany	Italy	Japan	United Kingdom	United States
A great deal	47.6	4.1	2.1	4.2	3.1	3.2	4.6	8.3
Quite a lot	47	26.2	28.6	40	20.7	36.7	24.7	25.1
Not very much	4.4	50.3	34.5	41.2	47.2	42	49.9	36.7
None at all	0.7	18.7	31.9	11.8	26.7	10.1	19.7	29
Don´t know	0.1	0	2.8	2.3	1.7	7.5	1.1	0
No answer	0.2	0.7	0.1	0.6	0.7	0.6	0	0.9
(N)	3.036	1.813	1.88	1.528	2.282	1.353	1.794	2.596

Table 6: WVS Wave7: Q71: Confidence: The Government (Inglehart et al.2020)

In fact, in the previous waves of the World Value Survey, the equivalent questions, such as the question V153 in wave 4, the question V138 in wave 5, and the question V115 in wave6, in which the data of China concerning this question are available, all the results show that Chinese people consistently rank high in terms of their trust in their government. This fact has also been proved by other international surveys. For instance, in the Edelman Trust Barometer 2020, China's percent trust in government is 90%, ranked first on the list of all the countries involved in this survey (Edelman 2020:40).

China's political system of one-party leadership and multi-party cooperation not only enjoys high prestige, but also has great advantages in rallying people's support, maintaining social stability and maintaining policy continuity. The consistent principles and policies have guided the successive leaders to methodically promote national development according to one "five-year plan" after another. After fully absorbing the appeals and opinions of representatives and experts from all walks of life, the central government has the dominant authority to design the country's development direction at the top level, to promote the construction of democracy, legal system and human rights at the grass-roots level step by step with strong executive ability. The advantages of China's national solidarity, powerful government, and unified leadership of the whole nation system have been effectively functioned in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, which has formed a very sharp contrast with the poor performance of some governments in western countries.

In addition, the political system of contemporary China also has a deep root in its long historical cultural tradition. Building people's confidence in the government is a basic principle of Confucian political philosophy. Confucius believed that it is important for a government to keep its people well fed and clothed, to maintain a strong national defence, and to build up the confidence of the people, and the most important of these three was building up people's confidence (Lau 1983:110-111). In the past few decades, the Chinese government has been committed to developing the economy, improving people's livelihood, eradicating poverty, improving the environment, and has brought about tremendous changes that are amazing to the world. Therefore, it is natural that the Chinese government has won the confidence and support from the majority of Chinese people.

The political concept of centralized and unified leadership in contemporary China also can be traced back to the idea of "Great Unification" in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* written by Confucius. In the last years of the Spring and Autumn period, when the disunited vassal states were fighting with each other, Confucius compiled the *Spring and Autumn Annals* to express his political ideas of keeping the Great Unification of the country, maintaining the order of the Kingly Way, and confronting the common enemies. After the Qin Dynasty (221bce-207bce) substantially established a unified national state system, for more than two thousand years, albeit witnessing national apart sometimes, the general trend of Chinese history is that the time of unification is much longer than the time of partition. Just as the famous historian and cultural scholar Qian Mu said, one of the characteristics of Chinese history is that whenever the country is in a state of unity and peace, Chinese society and culture as a whole has made development and progress; Whenever the country is at war and divided, society suffers destruction and degeneration (Qian 1991:12-13). Based on this historical and cultural tradition, the vast majority of the Chinese people cherish and consciously safeguard the country's political unity and social stability. Especially when confronting with a catastrophic event such as the novel coronavirus pandemic, or a threat such as foreign invasion, the broad masses of the people will be quickly mobilized and unite closely around the central government to overcome difficulties with one heart and one mind.

Conclusion

The global pandemic of COVID-19 in 2020 is a very unfortunate event in human history. Millions of people worldwide have been killed by the virus, and the world economy has been severely damaged. Yet the World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warns that COVID-19 won't be the world last pandemic. Therefore, people around the world should carefully sum up the experience and draw lessons from it, and get ready to deal with possible greater challenges. Actually, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic can also be considered as a test of the cultural adaptability for all the nations and regions in the world. It may even provide a rare opportunity for mankind to re-examine and rectify the development direction of human civilization. As some scholars has pointed out, the pandemic will force people to re-examine and rethink the relationship between individual and collective rights, the boundaries of men's right to freedom, the relationship between man and nature, and so on (Han 2020:547).

Although the contemporary capitalist culture characterized by advocating individualism and liberal democracy has contributed a lot in promoting the development of modern civilization, it also has its own drawbacks and limitations. The wide spreading of extreme individualism and liberalism, the aggravation of economic inequality, the estrangement between elite class and ordinary masses, the discrimination and confrontation between races and ethnic groups, division and splitting within societies, all these problems actually exist for long time in modern capitalist society, only now the COVID-19 pandemic has made them more exposed.

Contemporary Chinese culture is the continuation of its thousands year history and traditional culture, at the same time, it has integrated the achievements of modern civilization, absorbed the excellent quintessence of Western culture. It has demonstrated its outstanding advantages and strong vitality during the fighting against the pandemic of the COVID-19. The Chinese culture embodies humanist values that considers human life's value above anything else, a realistic attitude that respects science and faces reality, a belief that the destiny of individuals, groups, societies, nations and even the entire human race are closely linked, and a spirit of unity, cooperation, high trust and obedience to centralized and unified leadership. These cultural factors, which played a great role in combating the pandemic, deserve to be summarized and studied by people, which may provide some experience and enlightenment for human beings to deal with the possible greater crisis in the future.

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Biography

Keqian Xu got his Ph.D (specialized in Chinese Philosophy) from Fudan University, Shanghai, China, in 2000. He got his M.A. (specialized in ancient Chinese literature) in Nanjing Normal University in 1985. He has been teaching in the School of Chinese literature and Culture in Nanjing Normal University for more than 30 years. He was a visiting Scholar at Colorado University at Boulder, CO. USA (1994-1996), a visiting fellow at Australia National University, Canberra, Australia, (2005-2006), and a visiting Professor at North Carolina State University (Chinese Director of the Confucius Institute in NC State), Raleigh, NC., USA, (2007-2009). He was the Vice Chairman of the International Society for Universal Dialogue (ISUD) during the period of 2016-2018. He is now retired from Nanjing Normal University, but continues his career in the private Sanjiang University