

# Based on Ku Hongming's "The Sprite of the Chinese People" to Explore the Formation of Cultural Self-Confidence from Cultural Conservatism

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**Abstract**—Conservatism, as a cultural trend, was accompanied by the process of modernizations. Its basic feature is that it attempts to critique the overextension of instrumental rationality in modernization and the resulting social problems such as human alienation and moral loss. Its humanist tendencies and reflections on the modernization movement have their own unique cultural value. As a kind of critical and constructive thinking, Ku Hongming's cultural conservatism can participate in historical dialogue. In the new era, how should we view modernization and Chinese culture, how to maintain our national identity in the midst of the cultural storm of globalization, how to correctly treat Chinese traditional culture in the construction of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics, and how to promote the formation of cultural self-confidence, Ku Hongming's cultural perspectives have somehow given us deep thought and inspiration to some extent. *The Spirit of the Chinese People* is one of Ku's major works, and its contents are a direct reflection of Ku's thinking. Reading and Studying on this book will help us to understand his true thoughts and appreciate his cultural confidence and independent personality.

**Index Terms**—Ku Hongming, cultural perspectives, conservatism, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Ku Hongming (1857–1928), who had several English names, first Koh Hong-beng, Ku Hweng-Ming upon his return, as well as Kaw Hong Beng and Amoy Ku, but best known as Tomson. His life experience is legendary. His ancestral home was Tong'an, Fujian, and he was born into a prominent overseas Chinese family on Penang Island, Malaya. He had been studying in Europe since he was 13 years old, and has traveled to several countries for 11 years, learning both Chinese and Western, and was known as the "strange master of the late Qing Dynasty". He was fluent in 9 languages, including English, French, German, Latin, Greek and Malaysian, and had obtained a total of 13 doctorates, making him the first Chinese person to be proficient in Western science, language and oriental Chinese studies in the Qing Dynasty. Ku Hongming's special life experience had formed his unique cultural thought. His political career was not much to say, but the significance and importance of his life story lies in bridging Chinese and Western cultures and resorting to translation. In order to let Westerners understand the Chinese philosophy and spiritual morality of Confucius, he was diligent in writing. Ku wrote extensively throughout

his life, mostly in fluent English, with the aim of making Chinese culture known to Westerners and respectful of Chinese culture through understanding.

Ku Hongming's cultural conservatism focuses on social reality. He emphasized social order, the preservation of tradition, and the call for human values. From a historical point of view, these are a correction of social turmoil, loss of tradition, supremacy of science, expansion of utilitarianism, and elevation of instrumental rationality in the late Qing and early People's Dynasties. From a practical point of view, they can still cause us to think about today's society and ourselves, make us cherish the stability of today's society, and avoid the bias of the road of modernization.

## II. THE CAUSES OF KU'S CULTURAL CONSERVATISM

### A. Background of the Times

Since the 19th century, the industrial revolution had made great achievements in the Western capitalist economy and natural sciences, and people were generally full of confidence in the prospects of scientific development, believing that everything in nature and even human society and its spiritual life can be understood through science. Scientism became the most powerful trend of that century. However, after entering the 20th century, a series of developments in the field of natural sciences changed the way people thought. The birth of relativity and quantum science broke people's long-standing superstition of Newton's classical physics, and the mechanical determinism established on the old natural philosophy caused irreparable rifts, which made people feel that human society, thought, and spirit were more inscrutable. In addition, the First World War brought great damage to human society, many people developed a pessimistic disillusionment with reality, and skepticism and relativism began to rise in the West.

The increasing exposure of the shortcomings of Western capitalism, the corruption of the republican political situation in the early years of the Republic of China and the weakening of society have led to the growth of domestic cultural return. Many Chinese intellectuals hesitate to continue on the path of Westernization, and due to their own lack of advanced thinking or the influence of cultural conservative consciousness and class stance, they turned back to traditional culture in an attempt to find a remedy to save the world. In order to discuss historical figures, especially controversial ones, it is necessary to restore them to the historical and cultural environment in which they live, and based on the influence of the above-mentioned historical and cultural atmosphere, Ku Hongming has strengthened his

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confidence in the supremacy of traditional Chinese culture.

### *B. Origin and Sources*

Taking Ku Hongming's life experience as a clue, various ideas in Chinese and Western societies that he came into contact with during his life course had an impact on his formation of cultural conservatism, mainly including:

#### *1) Fighting spirit of European Romanticism*

European Romanticism is a cultural and social movement that emerged in Europe from the end of the 18th century to the 30s of the 19th centuries, which began with Rousseau and was established as a philosophical form after Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Schiller. Born out of the Enlightenment, Romanticism inherited the Enlightenment's spirit of freedom and struggle. After the French Revolution, it was also a reaction to the Enlightenment's preaching of the supremacy of reason. It has both the aspect of advocating struggle and pursuing modernization, and also criticizes the phenomena of "rational expansion" and "loss of value" in modernization.

Contaminated by Western society, Ku had a modern consciousness of pursuing freedom, equality and fraternity, and at the same time was discriminated against because of his Chinese identity and had dissatisfaction with Western society, so he was close to the romantic trend of thought that had both the progressive ideas of the times and the spirit of realistic criticism. The fighting spirit was one of the important parts of Ku's cultural thoughts [1].

#### *2) Traditional consciousness of European Conservatism*

European conservatism and Romanticism had a natural connection and close relationship, which provided the possibility for Ku to accept European conservatism, and therefore the content of Ku's cultural conservatism had many points of convergence with European conservatism. Firstly, conservatism reveres tradition, values experience and rejects the abstract theoretical design of people for society. Secondly, conservatism advocates natural law and believes that human civilization is a product of the natural development of history. Thirdly, European conservatism also emphasizes continuous and universal social connections and advocates valuing valuable traditions. Fourth, conservatism asserts that human inequality occurs naturally.

The influence of these four points on Ku's thinking can be seen in his social, political and changeable outlooks.

#### *3) Moral indoctrination of Christianity*

Ku Hongming's adoptive father, Mr. Brown, was a preacher who travelled all over the world to preach. Growing up in such a family environment, Ku was also well versed in the teachings of the Bible. Christianity thus became a standard for Ku's moral judgement and his own standard of goodness. Throughout his life, Ku was content with poverty. He never used his political position for personal gain or asked for kickbacks. He had never even skipped money, even if he was in extreme distress, he would still relieve Hanako in front of the door.

In addition, both European Romanticism and Conservatism placed great emphasis on the role of religion, so Ku Hongming, as an Eastern disciple of Romanticism and Conservatism, also attached great importance to the role of religion, and regarded Confucianism as a religion in China to emphasize its huge role in social norms.

#### *4) Cultural perceptions of nationalism*

Nationalism was a product of modern society, and the French Revolution marked the formation of modern nationalism. It is an ideology based on national sentiment, a love and loyalty of the members of a national community to their own nation, and the pursuit and ideal of national unity, independence and strength, i.e., survival and development.

Ku's ideology was strongly nationalistic, declaring "I love my country" and making many efforts to safeguard the interests of the nation. His conservatism was more in the form of cultural nationalism, and he spared no effort in promoting Chinese Confucianism, giving it a universalist character through his interpretation of its ethical values, making him a typical cultural nationalist in modern Chinese history.

#### *5) Value trend of traditional Chinese culture*

The mainstay of traditional Chinese culture is Confucianism, and what Ku calls Eastern civilization refers primarily to traditional Chinese Confucian culture. The influence of traditional Chinese culture on Ku mainly refers to the influence of Confucian culture.

After Ku's return to traditional Chinese Confucian culture, his Western-style anti-modernization ideas were constantly orientated by him, ultimately putting his cultural conservatism in the service of traditional Chinese society and traditional culture. The Confucian tenet "to establish the heart for heaven and earth, to establish the way for the living people, to succeed the saints in the past, and to open up peace for all ages" also became a historical mission that Ku Hongming consciously undertook. To this mission, Ku remained loyal to Chinese politics and religion and to Confucianism throughout his life.

### III. THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF KU'S CULTURAL CONSERVATISM

At the beginning of the 20th century, Chinese and Western cultures collided in an all-round way, and the academic trend of cultural conservatism aimed at maintaining the dominance of traditional Chinese culture came into being. The Nationalists, the Orientalists, the School of Xueheng, and the modern Neo-Confucians were all different manifestations of cultural conservatism at the time

Ku's cultural conservatism was distinctive in that it not only proclaimed the theory of the superiority of Chinese culture and the theory of the salvation of the West by Chinese culture, but also had a distinctive theoretical foundation. The main elements of his cultural conservatism, which is mostly reflected in his concern for and criticism of social reality, include:

#### *A. Social Attitudes*

Starting from understanding Western conservatism, Ku believes that human beings were the product of natural evolution, put forward the social concept of natural evolution, and made the subjective judgment that Chinese civilization with continuous development was superior to Western civilization with intermittent development, believing that continuous civilization could give birth to perfect social morality, while intermittent civilization could only produce extreme material civilization and material utilitarianism.

He argued that societies naturally develop into different social classes, which had certain responsibilities and duties to

each other and were interdependent on each other for the survival of society. He also attributed the ability of all strata to perform their respective responsibilities, to each other's responsibilities and obligations, and to have a good social order, to "in addition to the basic motive of interest, there is a more noble motive that influences people's behavior, and that is responsibility. In all relations of human society, the most important is responsibility". Therefore, he firmly believed that Eastern civilization based on morality and with good social order was superior to Western civilization with material interests as its goal and social order collapsed.

In addition, religious views were also a very important part of their social outlook. Ku Hongming advocated the combination of religion and education, and he attached great importance to the social power of religion, especially the moral indoctrination function of religion, and believed that religion was indispensable to society. In the face of the weight of nature and society, "religion gives people a sense of security and eternity", and if no substitute for religion can be found, "all living beings will always need religion", which teaches "the truth of human beings to which we must obey", "not the vulgar and despicable nature of the mediocre", but "a kind of sincerity". Confucianism, he explained, was originally a Chinese philosophy, but it "requires us to submit to our true nature, like religion." At the same time, "Confucianism has gained the faith of the whole people in China, and its norms are followed by the nation", becoming a moral force for maintaining social order. So, in this sense, Confucianism "becomes a religion or quasi-religion" [2]. Moreover, Confucianism is a social religion, focused on society, which "teaches people to be good citizens", i.e., a religion of good people. Confucianism also relies on man's "entire intellectual energy: reason and emotion" to honor the authority of society. Thus, Ku believed that Confucianism was more direct, more humane, more effective and more sustainable than Christianity in maintaining social order.

However, people still need to learn other things through education, and a healthy society should be a combination of religion and education. Ku insisted that China's education is perfect, not only teaching people the ability to adapt to social life, but also cultivating people's "ability to discern morality." The purpose of Chinese education is to promote the "development of society in a better direction" for the sake of enlightenment.

### *B. Political Perceptions*

Ku attached great importance to the social function of politics, which he regarded as the most important coordinating and managing force of social order.

He opposed the attitude of some new cultural figures in the early years of the Republic of China that only cared about culture and education and ignored politics. Ku's political concept was morality first, and he had repeatedly emphasized that only politics that obeys and serves morality could effectively play the role of controlling social order, and politics that obeyed morality could maintain the long-term stability of social order. In terms of the relationship between national interests and morality, Ku also advocated that the acquisition of national interests should be premised on morality [3].

But while valuing the enormous role of the individual ruler

in the moral rule of the state, he was not in favor of autocracy. For in his political thought, the right to moral rule was not a privilege of the ruling class, but a duty and obligation they owed to the state, and if the ruling class failed in their duty to rule, they would be punished by popular rebellion.

### *C. Variational Outlooks*

Although he presented himself as a conservative man with an almost obsessive paranoia about traditional Chinese culture, such as foot-binding, concubinage and the Eight-Legged Essay, he was also opposed to the extremes of old-fashionedness and clearly held a moderate and gradual approach to social change. He despised the extreme attitude of the radicals towards reform and advocated gradual change; he emphasized the inheritance of national culture and the preservation of national identity, but thus ignored the profound national crisis faced at the time.

In the face of China's changes, he was particularly wary of the impact of Western utilitarianism on traditional Chinese values, believing that the loss of traditional Chinese values would cause serious consequences, from the material level to the political, legal, ethical and moral rituals of China, which would be "shaken in order and lost in a constant manner". He said: "The reason why China is in such a miserable situation is mainly because our Chinese, especially intellectuals, have left behind the essence of Eastern civilization" [4]. Ku urged the Chinese to focus on spiritual and moral exchanges with Western societies and on the refinement of Chinese Confucian culture itself in the context of these exchanges. In his view, moral reform was a prerequisite for successful social reform.

Looking at this cultural thought of Ku Hungming, his cultural advocacy for China to learn from the West for modernization while opposing the importation of Western utilitarianism into China in order to avoid the expansion of utilitarianism and the atrophy of human morality is still forward-looking today.

## **IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF KU'S CULTURAL CONSERVATISM**

Ku Hongming received a complete Western-style education during his highly malleable adolescence. His thoughts, knowledge, and outlook on life were completely westernized.

Therefore, some people commented that it's more appropriate to classify him as a purely Western scholar than to say that he was an "international student with a Western education." After returning to China, with his gradual in-depth understanding of Confucian culture, Ku integrated the Chinese and Western cultures he accepted and played the role of "electroplater of Eastern and Western concepts". He understood and accepted Confucianism from his Westernized perspective, and his inherent Western-style ideas were enriched, enriched and developed in Confucian culture, and expressed in the form of Confucian culture.

In short, Ku Hongming's combination of Chinese and Western thought was unique compared with modern cultural conservative schools such as the Nationalists, the Orientalists, the School of Xueheng, and the modern Neo-Confucians in the late Qing Dynasty.

#### *A. Uniting Cultural and Political Conservatism*

Ku was not only culturally conservative, but also politically conservative. He advocated traditional Chinese Confucianism culturally and a monarchical system of government politically.

Ku viewed Chinese Confucian culture from a Western perspective and firmly believed that Confucian morality was a powerful weapon against modern utilitarianism. He believed that “unlike the societies of the East, which are based on morality, their societies are based on money, in other words, in the East, the relationship between people is a moral relationship, and in the West it is a money relationship” [4]. Therefore, he vigorously preached the principle of moral supremacy in Confucian culture, and in order to maintain moral supremacy, he did not even care about the specific form of social power. He believed that in China, only the emperor could give moral guidance to the whole society, and was the embodiment and defender of the Confucian moral spirit.

In essence, Ku valued the cultural significance of Confucianism over its political significance. He said: “A Chinese, especially an educated Chinese, who betrays the code of honor and abandons the way of loyalty to the emperor, the great righteousness of fame in Confucius’ state religion, then such a Chinese who has lost the spirit of the nation and the spirit of the race is no longer a true Chinese [4].

#### *B. Deep Contradictions between Eastern and Western Perceptions*

Ku’s cultural conservatism was a blend of East and West, but Chinese and Western cultures were, after all, two very different cultural systems and inherent conflicts were inevitable, resulting in certain irreconcilable contradictions.

Firstly, Ku was unable to truly reconcile the contradictions between Western democracy and the Chinese monarchy. Ku claimed that monarchy was not incompatible with democracy, for democracy as he understood it was self-government on a moral basis. He believed that the Chinese practiced self-government under the cultivation and example of the noble morality of the ruler or monarch, and that this self-government was not imposed on the people by the ruler, but was voluntary on the part of all the people, who were imbued with Confucianism, and he believed that the people could ‘naturally restrain their own actions and obtain the essence of social culture even without relying on the government’.

Secondly, Ku was unable to reconcile the two opposing views of humanity, the ‘human evil’ of Western conservative thought and the ‘human good’ preached by Chinese Confucianism. In his book *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, he gives a systematic account of the characteristics of Confucianism and its great role in the goodness of human nature. In the book, Confucianism teaches people to be good citizens and is the religion of the good people in China, a religion that “teaches every child, as soon as he can read, the saying: ‘At the beginning of man, nature is good’”. He also points out that this belief in the power of goodness is the law of love. As a result, the Chinese were able to be filial to their parents, worship their ancestors and be absolutely loyal to the emperor, so that “this loyalty and faithfulness led to the observance of norms” and “consolidated the state and made it

immortal, without which both human society and civilization would have suffered destruction and man himself would have degenerated into a savage or an animal “.

Based on this understanding, Ku concluded that the doctrine of “human goodness” was the foundation and primary principle of the Chinese religion of the good people. He criticized the Western doctrine of “human evil”, arguing that “the basic fallacy of today’s European civilization is rooted in a wrong understanding of human nature, that is, in the idea that human nature is inherently evil, and because of this wrong idea, the whole social structure of Europe has always depended on force to sustain it “.

#### *C. Cultural Conservatism with Romantic Overtones*

One of the characteristics of Ku’s cultural conservatism was that it was tinged with romanticism. This is evident in the fact that while he strongly advocated the Chinese monarchy, he subjectively gave the autocracy the connotation of modern democracy: he tried his best to boast of his loyalty to the emperor, but dared to rebel against the rulers he regarded as morally corrupt; he strove to promote Chinese Confucianism, but aimed to promote the healthy development of Western modernization.

#### *D. Strong Cultural Nationalist Sentiments*

Ku Hongming’s cultural conservatism was strongly nationalistic, and the development of his cultural nationalist ideas passed through two broad stages.

Before World War I, it was defensive. The main purpose of Ku’s work during this period was “not to expect the West to adopt the ideal model of Chinese Confucian civilization at that time, but to let the West understand China and know that China had a high degree of civilization, which was not inferior to the West.” In the final analysis, he wanted the West to know that it should respect the Chinese nation and culture in order to survive and develop the Chinese Confucian civilization and traditional social order for itself”.

After the First World War, it behaved as an offensive type. Ku was more determined to propagate Confucian culture to the West and advocated the salvation theory of Confucian culture. He wanted to prove that Chinese Confucian culture was superior to Western culture, and that the West should treat Chinese culture as equals, not treat Chinese people with violence, and they should realize that “they were dealing with a highly civilized people who were more subservient to morality than to brutal force” [5].

### V. THE VALUE OF KU’S CULTURAL CONSERVATISM

Ku Hungming was a cultural conservative with a distinctive character in the history of modern Chinese thought and culture. His cultural outlook, which was both Western and Chinese, made him highly regarded in Western society, but despised and known for his eccentricity in China. In order to make a more objective historical assessment of him, it is necessary to delve into the specific context of his time and place his cultural conservatism in its specific cultural context, so as to uncover spiritual and cultural resources that are conducive to the development of current cultural self-confidence and the construction of a strong cultural country.

Ku Hongming and his cultural conservatism are a unique cultural phenomenon in modern cultural history, and his ideas are a complex of contradictions. His insights were different from those of the feudal “hard-headed” school and the “foreign affairs school”, as well as from the “nationalists” and the “Orientalists” of the early Republic of China. He was different from both the “Oriental Culture School” and the “Neo-Confucianism” of the early Ming Dynasty. The Nationalists, the Orientalists, the School of Xueheng, and the modern Neo-Confucians were all different manifestations of cultural conservatism at the time. His respect and sympathy for Chinese civilization and his sense of mission to preserve the culture of his people were sympathetic and understandable. He drew a boundary between the “boundless” radicalism and the cultural conservatism of his own views, thus highlighting a pluralistic and open cultural and academic landscape in the context of twentieth-century intellectual history, and providing a thought-provoking “memorandum of thought”. It is these contradictions that have become the most distinctive signature of Ku’s cultural conservatism, destined to have a distinctive value for the times.

#### *A. For that Time*

Ku Hongming lived in a period of great historical changes in the collision, convergence and choice of Chinese and Western cultures. The Chinese nation was faced with the dual challenges of invasion by the great powers and the impact of a heterogeneous Western civilization, and had to renew its traditional culture while maintaining national sovereignty. At the same time, as Western capitalism continued to conquer the world, the crisis of its own society and civilization became increasingly evident, and it had to absorb the strengths of Chinese culture to transform its own society and civilization [6].

In the midst of the clash between Chinese and Western cultures, Ku made a contribution to the exchange between Chinese and Western civilizations in modern times through his unique experience and ideas of blending and bridging Chinese and Western civilizations.

In modern China, with the national crisis as the theme of the times, advanced Chinese focused their vision and energy on Western civilization and paid attention to learning from the West. But they neglected to educate Westerners about China’s historical responsibility. Ku Hongming advocated that the progress of Chinese society should be driven by traditional Confucian culture, and that learning from the West should also be based on Chinese culture.

In the midst of the clash between Chinese and Western cultures, Ku Hongming made a contribution to the exchange between Chinese and Western civilizations in modern times through his unique experience and ideas of blending and bridging Chinese and Western civilizations. Moreover, Ku Hongming’s critique of modernization had a certain rationality of the times, and in China’s modern history, he undertook the historical task of reflecting on modernity from tradition and communicating modernity with tradition, which was valuable at that time [7].

#### *B. For the Present*

Firstly, Ku’s emphasis on cultural nationality is still relevant to the cultural construction of contemporary China.

It enlightens us to firmly safeguard our own cultural traditions under the influence of various ideological trends, to have a confident and pious attitude towards our own culture, to strive to preserve traditions, and to adhere to human civilization. This positive attitude should continue to be inherited and extended in the construction of today’s cultural self-confidence, especially in the attitude towards China’s excellent traditional culture, and then firmly guard these precious spiritual civilization wealth.

The excellent traditional Chinese culture is the “root” and “soul” of the Chinese nation, accumulating the deepest spiritual pursuit of the Chinese nation. We should be fully aware of the essence of the values in our excellent traditional culture, and strive to preserve the originality of it. The purpose of holding on to tradition is to better see the world, understand life and know ourselves, and to better understand the past, grasp the present and face the future [8].

Secondly, Ku’s work has long aroused people’s patriotic enthusiasm. From the perspective of cultural exchange and the westernization of secondary school, he prompted the nation to begin to look at its own civilization and discover the modern values embedded in traditional Chinese culture, promoting a sense of pride and patriotism, which is also important for strengthening cultural self-confidence today. From the national point of view, with the goal of promoting Chinese culture and using traditional culture as a link, and by constantly emphasizing the value of traditional Chinese culture, it will inspire patriotism and a sense of national, ethnic and cultural identity among the nation, and promote the firm cultural confidence of all Chinese people, which will help to continuously strengthen the Chinese nation’s high level of identification with peaceful reunification and create an inexhaustible development impetus and strong cohesion for the Chinese nation.

The 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out that the core values of socialism should be actively cultivated and practiced. To a certain extent, the trend of Chinese culture research and dissemination has also played a role in curbing and improving the phenomena of lack of ideal belief, confusion of ultimate concerns, spiritual nihilism and absurdity in contemporary society, and has played a strengthening and promoting role in building the spiritual home of the Chinese nation and promoting the creation and precipitation of Chinese culture. The traditional Chinese culture of harmony, justice and benevolence, which has always been the standard of value judgement in Chinese society, not only promotes personal cultivation, but also lays a solid foundation for the promotion of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics, and plays a positive role in continuously deepening reform, vigorously building a modern and powerful country, and promoting the development of the road to modernization.

Cultural confidence is derived from the respect and pride in the essence of Chinese culture, and points to the continuous cultural exploration on the road to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. President Xi Jinping has repeatedly mentioned that “cultural confidence is a more fundamental, deeper and more enduring force in the development of a country and a nation”. In today’s social development, in the increasingly fierce international competition, and in the great cause of achieving the great

rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, cultural confidence is a proposition of the times put forward by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. It deeply reflects the country's and the people's cherishing of the outstanding achievements of Chinese civilization, and contains the beautiful vision of China's excellent traditional culture standing in the forest of the world's nations for a long time, and also injects a constant source of cultural impetus for the realization of the Chinese Dream.

Although Ku Hongming's cultural conservatism has its own obvious limitations of its time and values, and its advocacy of traditional culture is somewhat biased, it has its political and class background, and is distinctly ideological and relevant. But we can still stand in the current social context and selectively absorb its views. No matter how good the foreign cultures are, they always have an accurate positioning of their own cultural traditions, and always put them in the position of sticking to the ontology, and put forward their own introduction standards and conditions in the context of the time.

In the current construction of "cultural self-confidence", President Xi Jinping regards the excellent traditional Chinese culture as a strategic resource, adheres to a respectful attitude, consciously connects the essence of Chinese history and culture with socialism with Chinese characteristics in the practice of governance, and regards traditional culture as the "root" and "soul" of its own development in the critical period of realizing the comprehensive construction of a moderately prosperous society.

We should start from the ideological basis of traditional culture, fully respect its main features and connotations without departing from them, closely follow the needs of the times and the wishes of the people, and take it as our mission to answer real social problems, draw ideological nourishment from the excellent Chinese traditional culture, and work on the enhancement of our own excellent traditional culture and ideological progress in accordance with the current situation of social development.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The value of history lies in the fact that it largely reflects the meaning of current life, which is not only a cultural inheritance, but also a kind of national spirit promotion and social belief construction. Ku Hongming's cultural conservatism focuses on social reality. His emphasis on social order, the preservation of tradition, and the call for human ethical values are, from a historical point of view, a correction of social turmoil, loss of tradition, supremacy of science, expansion of utilitarianism, and elevation of instrumental rationality in the late Qing Dynasty. From a practical point of view, it can still cause us to think about today's society and ourselves, make us cherish the stability of today's society, and avoid the deviation from the path of modernization.

Always proud to be Chinese, Ku Hongming also strove to defend the dignity of traditional Chinese culture with an attitude bordering on obstinacy, and was therefore seen as a typical example of extreme conservatism. People were often fascinated by his eccentricities, but overlooked the legitimacy of his confrontation with the hegemony of radical

discourse. Ku Hongming's grotesque behavior was caused by his personal psychological condition, as well as the embarrassing situation at the time of the alternation of the old and the new. His disbelief in the sweep of the new culture and new thinking inevitably led him to feel a little disoriented, and the shattered mountains and rivers and national distress he faced gave rise to strong patriotic feelings, and the theory of Chinese superiority was a position he always maintained.

*The Sprite of the Chinese People* is a mirror that can reflect Ku Hongming's consistent understanding and attitude towards Chinese culture. Through the study of this book, it is helpful to further understand the specific connotation and manifestation of Ku Hongming's cultural conservatism, and also help to understand the complex feelings of the old school scholars represented by Ku Hongming in the agitation of old and new ideas, and understand their sense of responsibility in the bones of local cultural people when the country is in danger. Modern Chinese generally face the situation of loss of value, and it is necessary to advocate traditional culture to change the restlessness and blindness of the spiritual world. China's modernization cannot be completely divorced from tradition, but requires continuous dialogue and reflection between tradition and modernity. For Ku Hongming and his cultural conservatism, we should be able to appreciate its charm, but also be able to discern and resist its charm.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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