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Analysis of Aesthetic Image of 24 Solar Terms in the Videos of Li Ziqi

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Abstract

As an aesthetic image, the 24 solar terms represent Chinese people's compliance with and respect for the natural law, which are a natural presentation of the traditional culture of "harmony and unity". The videos of Li Ziqi do not only correctly grasp and fully arouse the traditional cultural implications behind the 24 solar terms, but also create some innovative expressions on this basis to strike a chord in the audience and make them long for harmonious coexistence with nature and reflect in life.

Keywords

Videos of Li Ziqi; 24 solar terms; Aesthetic image.

1. Introduction

The videos of Li Ziqi (Here it refers to Li Ziqi and her creating team. For the convenience and concision of expression in the text, they are all referred to as "Li Ziqi" uniformly.) take root in the rich traditional Chinese culture, mainly inspired by traditional foods, traditional crafts, traditional festivals, etc., showing to the audience a picture roll of simple pastoral life and enjoying great popularity at home and abroad. By June 2021, Li Ziqi had uploaded 141 videos onto the Bilibili website, attracted 7.847 million fans and received 13.041 million likes, who was honored by the Weibo as one of the "Popular Figures of the Year" in 2020. Her success is not only attributable to her unique narrative style and aesthetic pictures in the videos, but also to her profound understanding and unique application of the traditional time image of China, especially the aesthetic image behind the 24 solar terms.

In 2016, the 24 solar terms were officially listed among the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List, which attracted wide attention from the world. Established by Chinese, the 24 solar terms are a knowledge system and social practice by observing the solar motion in a year and based on their understandings of the changing patternof such areas from season, climate and phenology, which deeply influence the thinking and herbehaviors of Chinese people. They are an important carrier [5] of the cultural identity of Chinese nation. In the videos of Li Ziqi, be it production of traditional food and drinks such as wine fermented with osmanthus flowers, dried persimmon, and thick broad-bean paste, or the making of handicrafts like bamboo sofa, plant dyed cloth and silk, behind them is the application of knowledge about 24 solar terms and the representation of related social practice. From 2017 to 2021, there were 691 studies on the videos of Li Ziqi according to the retrieval on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), yet among the large number of studies, few scholars have interpreted the aesthetic image of videos from the dimension of time (In the "Expression of Aesthetic Image in the Short Videos of Li Ziqi", Peng Jiani analyzed it from two prospects, namely natural and social aesthetic images. Taking the time image as one of the images for natural aesthetics, Peng argued that it embodies the concept of "unity between humans and nature" upheld by Chinese people, which is natural aesthetics of ecocentrism. In the "Construction of Time and Space Images for Contemporary

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nostalgia in the Short Videos of Li Ziqi", Fan Chen starts from three characteristics of nostalgia in terms of space, time and subject to analyze the construction of time and space images of nostalgia in the short videos of Li Ziqi and argues that the time image is one of the factors to arouse nostalgia in the audience). Next, this paper will unfold the analysis from three prospects, the aesthetic image of 24 solar terms, the applications, and the unique expressions of such aesthetic image in the videos of Li Ziqi.

2. Aesthetic Image of 24 Solar Terms

Due to the demand of farming labor in the agricultural society and being influenced by the primitive religious concepts, ancient Chinese people have begun to observe the stars and explore the universe since a very early age, and developed 24 solar terms based on the astronomical phenology of the Yellow River Basin. Some scholar believed that the 24 solar terms might have probably been started to be explored since the Xia and Shang dynasties (The two researchers both take the analysis of time image as part of the entire research, but have not unfolded a complete and in-depth interpretation on the above viewpoints). That records "longest daytime" and "shortest daytime" in the "Twelve Ji in Mister Lv's Spring and Autumn Annals" indicates that people at that time already confirmed the two solar terms, Winter Solstice and Summer Solstice [5]. Before the Spring and Autumn Period, eight solar terms Spring Equinox, Autumn Equinox, Summer Solstice, Winter Solstice, Beginning of Spring, Beginning of Summer, Beginning of Autumn, and Beginning of Winter were inferred [4]. During the Warring States Period, the records of 24 solar terms appeared in many literature. The 24 solar terms recorded in the "Ancient Book on Phenology" were fairly complete (The titles and sequences of 24 solar terms recorded in the "Ancient Book on Phenology" are: Beginning of Spring, Insects Awaken, Rainwater, Spring Equinox, Grain Rain, Pure Brightness, Beginning of Summer, Lesser Fullness, Grain in Ear, Summer Solstice, Slight Heat, Great Heat, Beginning of Autumn, Limit of Heat, White Dew, Autumn Solstice, Cold Dew, Frost's Descent, Beginning of Winter, Light Snow, Heavy Snow, Winter Solstice, Slight Cold and Great Cold.), though in the original text the sequences of "Insects Awaken" and "Rainwater", "Pure Brightness" and "Grain Rain" were exchanged, a little different from those we're familiar with today. During the Qin and Han Dynasties, the establishment of 24 solar terms was almost complete and fixed officially [3]. The system of 24 solar terms confirmed in the "Huainanzi", a philosophical work of the Western Han Dynasty, remained unchanged in the subsequent 2,000 years or so and has been carried on to date [3].

In the process of forming and perfecting the 24 solar terms, their connotation is increasingly enriched and has been endowed with unique aesthetic implications. As one of the central parts of traditional Chinese calendar, the 24 solar terms are not only a symbol for the division of seasons, but more an important basis for the laboring people of Chinese agricultural society to grasp the growth time of crops and understand their life pattern. In the ancient China dominated by agriculture, most of the material goods necessary to people's existence came from agricultural labor. The harvest of a year would directly determine the living conditions and quality of the laboring people. After long exploration and summary of experience, people have gradually realized that only by complying with the law of nature and farming, sowing, weeding, and harvesting under the guide of solar terms can they ensure the abundance of material goods output to the largest extent. Otherwise, it will lead to negative outcomes. Such preliminary understanding of the law behind the relationship between humans and nature has laid the ideological foundation for Chinese people to respect and comply with the nature, which has been gradually reflected in the cultural field. The Taoist school was the earliest one to put forward the category of "nature", taking "unity between humans and nature" as their highest ideal. In the classics of Confucianism, "The ax should be forbidden from the mountainous forests

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in the March of spring so that grass and trees can grow." ("Ancient Book on Phenology") "Confucius catches fish by angling rather than with a fishing net, and never shoots birds that return for rest." ("The Analects of Confucius") and other records indicate that only when resources are gained at the right time and used under a limit can humans get along in harmony with the nature.

Generally speaking, the core connotations of the aesthetic image of 24 solar terms are complying with and respecting the nature and pursuing a harmonious living state between humans and the nature. After constant perfection, such connotations have ultimately been condensed into the thoughts of "harmony" and "moderation" in the traditional Chinese culture. Driven by such thoughts, the doctrine of yin-yang and five elements, the regular pattern of diet and daily life and a series of related ritual and sacrificial activities were formed around the 24 solar terms, which in essence are a manifestation of the ancient people's pursuit of harmony between humans and nature based on unleashing their subjective initiative. It can be said that the 24 solar terms and their core connotations have been embedded into the Chinese people's understanding of time and their way of getting along with the nature as a cultural gene and become an important carrier of the cultural identity of Chinese nation.

3. Application of the Aesthetic Image of 24 Solar Terms in the Videos of Li Ziqi

The 24 solar terms represent a harmonious and unified living state between humans and nature, which, after constant interpretation and enriching in the past dynasties and periods, have ultimately been condensed into an important part of traditional Chinese culture, that is, "harmony" and "moderation". Based on an internal logic of 24 solar terms and with the aid of lens language, the videos of Li Ziqi are a vivid illustration of the changes of four seasons, the agricultural work, and the living scenes of peasants, which have opened a window for modern people to return to nature and the countryside and represented the traditional aesthetic implications of 24 solar terms to a certain extent.

Let's take Beginning of Summer as an example. On this solar term, it was recorded in the "Interpretation of 72 Pentads of Climate and Phenology in Lunar Months" that "At the time of summer, all things grow to be big", which means the crops that were planted in the spring have grown up at this time, so their management should enter a key stage. Meanwhile, there is a farmers' proverb, "Summer is foreboded by the Beginning of Summer", which means after the Beginning of Summer, crops like winter wheat and oilseed rape are almost ripe, so the year's harvest of summer crops can be basically confirmed from this time [9]. Therefore, during the Beginning of Summer, the videos released by Li Ziqi usually begin with a luxuriantly green valley and adopt the delayed shots such as "plants grow up", "flowers bloom" and "stars changing in positions" as transition scenes accompanied by background sounds like chirps of insects and birds. In this way, in terms of vision and hearing, the audience seem to be taken into a vibrant and vigorous mountain in the summer. In order to reflect the characteristics of solar terms, in some videos there are also scenes of peasants working and weeding under the scorching sun, and typical summer plants like morning glories, sunflowers, cherry tomatoes and vines have appeared repeatedly in the background environment. After the Beginning of Summer, tea trees grow at a faster speed and need to be picked at once. Otherwise, they will be aged, just as a farmers' proverb says, "Tea leaves are seldom picked during Grain Rain, but are busily picked during the Beginning of Summer" [9]. The Beginning of Summer is the key period for the harvest of tea leaves. The busy scenes of tea peasants picking and frying tea leaves during this time have been vividly reproduced in the video "Tea Culture". Meanwhile, ancients believed that the life cycle of all things on earth is closely related with the circulation of yin and yang spirits. The yang spirit is growing in the summer. As the start of a summer, the Beginning

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of Summer has attracted attention from people since the ancient time. On the day of Beginning of Summer, the Emperor of Zhou would lead three councilors and nine ministers of the state and other officials to the southern outskirt to hold a summer greeting ceremony [2]. In the regions south of the Yangtze River, the folks also have to pay sacrifice to the ancestors. Every family will worship the ancestors with three seasonal delicacies like “cherry, green plum and new wheat” or “bamboo shoot, cherry and broad beans”, which is called “three new delicacies in the Beginning of Summer” [6]. Through ceremonies and sacrificial activities, people wish to shorten their distance from the nature to the largest extent, grasp the law of nature and better satisfy their living demands. Supported by these traditional cultural connotations, Li Ziqi prepared tasteful dishes such as pea jelly, shredded bamboo shoot, green plum wine, green plum feast, homemade beer and maltose with the raw materials of “three fresh delicacies in the Beginning of Summer” in the videos, which have thus become so popular among the audience and won their praise and struck a chord among them.

Table 1. Seasonal Composition of Videos Released by Li Ziqi (N=141)

Season	Quantity	%
Spring	20	14.18
Summer	42	29.79
Autumn	50	35.46
Winter	29	20.57

(The statistical scope of spring in the table above is from Beginning of Spring to before Beginning of Summer, the scope of summer is from Beginning of Summer to before Beginning of Autumn, the scope of autumn is from Beginning of Autumn to before Beginning of Winter, and the scope of winter is from Beginning of Winter to before Beginning of Spring next year.)

In addition, most of the foodstuffs and agricultural activities in the videos are from real pastoral life. The topics selected by some videos appear accidental and random, but in fact they cannot be separated from the law of the 24 solar terms and the rich cultural connotation behind it. It can be found from the data analysis of the 141 videos posted by Li Ziqi from July 25, 2016 to June 5, 2021 that in terms of seasonal composition, Li Ziqi has posted the most videos during autumn, 50 in total, accounting for 35.46%, which is because most fruits and vegetables are ripe in autumn and provide a rich variety of subjects for videos. 42 videos have been posted in summer, second to summer, accounting for 29.79%, which is because there is abundant sunshine in summer, the plants grow vigorously. In the winter, though trees and grass have withered, it is close to the New Year, related festivals and folk customs are relatively concentrated. Therefore, 29 videos were posted in this season, accounting for 20.57%. In the spring, all things have just awakened and many crops have just been planted and are under the early stage of growth. For this reason, the least videos have been posted in spring, with only 20 ones posted, accounting for 14.18%.

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Table 2. Subject Matters of Videos Released by Li Ziqi

Season	Foods			Handmade
Spring	• Garlic • Potherb • New Year • Peach gum • Silk flower • Mayonnaise	• Peach Blossom • Snow-water fish • Magnolia flower • The Life of Peas • Fried dough twist • New Year's Eve dinner	• Appetizing stewed duck • Special purchases for Spring Festival • Stewed pigeon with plum flower • Preserved Szechuan pickle	• Silk flower • Blue dye • Hydrolate • Four precious articles on writing table • Bread oven
Summer	• Jam • Tomato • Ketchup • Pea jelly • Ice cream • Tea culture • Tender buds • The Life of Cucumber • Baked corn cake • Green plum feast • Edible Tree Leaves • The Life of Wheat • Green plum wine	• Passion fruit • Liquored fish • Salted spareribs • Homemade beer • Strawberry wine • Lanzhou noodles • Black mushroom • Lotus flower wine • Termite mushroom • Peach Blossom Cake • Thick broad-bean paste • Bacon and sausage with beef • Zongzi in bamboo shoot shell • Raspberry ice popsicle	• Shredded bamboo shoot • Damascus rose petal jam • The Life of Oilseed Rape • Stewed pigeon with plum flower • Unique preparation methods of potato • Braised beef tenderloin with tomato • Assortment of fruits and vegetables • Dragon Boat shaped Zongzi • Preserved termite mushrooms with chili • Lotus root starch with osmanthus and nuts • Rice noodles with river snails	• Washstand • Winding water table • Swing made with old objects • Clothes made with grape skin
Autumn	• Corn • Rose • Rice • Cherry • Kumiss • Mapo tofu • Herbal tea • Beef paste • Royal paste • The Life of Rose • The Life of Chili • Rice with taro • Dai flavor rice • Osmanthus wine	• Lover's cake • Loquat wine • Bean sprouts • Pumpkin pot • Yellow peach • Preserved egg • Dried cowpea • Braised mutton • Lotus flower tea • Chinese chestnut • Dried persimmon • Double Nine cake • Matsutake Harvest season • Canned yellow peach in ice • Donkey-hide gelatin • Changbai Mountain ginseng honey	• Autumn pear cream • Spicy shredded beef • Double Seven pastry • Shanxi shaved noodles • Congee with sliced fish • Okra and morning glory • Honey and grapefruit tea • Chicken wrapped in lotus leaf • Handmade Ferrero chocolate • Traditional handmade mooncake • The Life of Water Melon and Cucumber • Jiangsu style fresh pork mooncake • Glutinous rice and spareribs in lotus leaf	• Silk quilt • Flower rouge • Sichuan embroidery • Bamboo ware •Movable-type printing • Collection of handicrafts
Winter	• Ginger • Hotpot • Soy sauce • Cured foods • The Life of Taro • Taste of Childhood • Wild jujube cake • The Life of Turnip	• Brown sugar • Spicy cabbage • Sichuan pickle • Sichuan hotpot • Mantis shrimps • Red persimmon • Sauced pork bones • Sweet potato starch • Steamed cured foods • Roast chicken on firewood	• Cooked liquored crab • Copper pot shabushabu • Rice with sausage in clay pot • Laba porridge with eight ingredients • Stewed seafood and poultry • Baking pot and Jinyun pancake • Soybean milk and purple yam rice cake	• Cotton •Paper-making • Strong cloth soles • Woolen cloak

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(The above table shows videos of foods and handicraft classified by their proportion. The proportions of foods and handicraft in Silk Flower are similar, so it is labeled in both columns.)

In terms of subject matters, based on the nature of products, the 141 videos posted by Li Ziqi can be classified into two categories, "foods" and "handicrafts", of which there are more food videos. In the food videos, most foodstuffs used by Li Ziqi are seasonal products, and many of the foods prepared show distinctive seasonal characteristics. For example, all things awaken in the spring, as flowers like plum flower, peach flower, magnolia flower azalea blooming in succession. All these flowers have become common foodstuffs in the videos made in the spring. Fruits and melons are ripe in the summer. Thereis a rich variety of them, like green plum, raspberry, passion fruit, strawberry, and tomato. It turns cool in the autumn. From the perspective of health promotion, we should pay attention to regulating our body. Therefore, rare health-promoting products in the other seasons like donkey-hide gelatin, honey and grapefruit tea, herbal tea, Changbai Mountain ginseng honey and autumn pear cream are mainly available in the autumn.

Influenced by traditional culture, the living state of harmony and unity among "heaven, earth and humans" has been pursued constantly by Chinese people. By reproducing the traditional cultural implications of 24 solar terms, Li Ziqi has conveyed to the audience her understanding of pastoral life and perception of the relationship between humans and nature to re-arouse people's longing for a harmonious life between humans and nature, which is also where the charm of her videos lies.

4. Unique Expression of Aesthetic Image of 24 Solar Terms in the Videos of Li Ziqi

It can be found by carefully analyzing the view counts of 141 videos of Li Ziqi, the videos that rank top in terms of view counts mainly belong to her "The Life series". Among the top ten videos in terms of view counts, this series account for half. "The Life series" are 22 videos (As long as time or solar term is identified in the video, and the growth process of specific plants is presented completely, the video can be considered as one of "The Life series".) released by Li Ziqi from October 2019 to January 2021. Based on the clue of the growth cycle of specific plants, this series completely present the process how these plants turn from a seed to various dishes, which usually take up to a year or two. Compared with other videos, "The Life series" have innovated the expression of aesthetic image of 24 solar terms and won recognition from the audience.

"The Life Series" videos have been favored by the audience because they have broken the time and space limitation and show the changes of multiple solar terms in a video, bringing to the audience a more "immersed" natural experience. Compared with other videos, the greatest feature of "The Life Series" lies in the continuity and completeness of time expression. By watching "The Life Series" videos, the audience can go through the changes of solar terms in four seasons in tens of minutes and witness the entire process of a plant from sowing, breaking out of earth, transplanting, growth, weeding, harvest to being served on the table. Whenever there is a change of solar terms, the video will remind the audience with subtitles and special environment symbols such as pear flower in the Rainwater, ear of wheat in the Grain in Ear, fallen leaves in the Autumn Equinox, and wintersweet in the Winter Solstice. In the video of "The Life of Wheat", Li Ziqi first sowed the wheat seeds in the autumn. After a heavy rain, the seeds germinated in succession. During the Light Snow, the wheat seedlings continued to grow higher. After the Spring Equinox, they began to bear ears of grain. During the Summer Solstice, the wheat was basically ripe and could be harvested. After the harvest, the wheat went through

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Table 3. Time span and count view ranking of "The Life Series" videos

Subject matter	Time span	Ranking in terms of view counts
Potato	Beginning of Winter in 2019--Heavy Snow of 2019--Insects Awaken of 2020--Lesser Fullness of 2020	5
Soy beans	Pure Brightness of 2018--Autumn Equinox of 2018--Cold Dew of 2018--Pure Brightness of 2019--Autumn Equinox of 2019--Light Snow of 2019	6
Cotton	Grain Rain of 2019--Grain in Ear of 2019--September of 2019	7
Cucumber	Winter of 2019--Before Beginning of Spring in 2020--Rainwater of 2020	8
Water Melon and Cucumber	Before Beginning of Spring in 2020--Rainwater of 2020--Grain Rain of 2020--Beginning of Summer in 2020--Slight Heat of 2020--Great Heat of 2020--After Limit of Heat in 2020	9
Turnip	Spring Equinox of 2020--Grain in Ear of 2020--Limit of Heat of 2020--Slight Cold of 2020	11
Garlic	Autumn of 2019--Spring of 2020	12
Taro	Spring Equinox of 2020--Pure Brightness of 2020--Grain Rain of 2020--Great Heat of 2020--Autumn Equinox of 2020--Frost's Descent of 2020	13
Tomato	Spring Festival of 2020--After Beginning of Spring in 2020--Insects Awaken of 2020--Before Beginning of Summer in 2020	15
Wheat	Autumn of 2019--Light Snow of 2019--Spring Equinox of 2020--Beginning of Summer in 2020	18
Rose	Insects Awaken of 2020--Grain Rain of 2020--Beginning of Summer in 2020	19
Oilseed Rape	White Dew of 2019--Frost's Descent of 2019--Insects Awaken of 2020--Pure Brightness of 2020--Beginning of Summer in 2020	20
Peas	Autumn Equinox of 2019--Light Snow of 2019--Spring Equinox of 2020--Before Beginning of Summer in 2020	20
Harvest season	Insects Awaken of 2020--Spring Equinox of 2020--Pure Brightness of 2020--Autumn Equinox of 2020	22
Ginger	Late spring of 2019--Summer of 2019--Autumn of 2019--Winter of 2019	23
Blue dye	Summer of 2019--Autumn of 2019--Winter of 2019	27
Chili	Early spring of 2019--Autumn of 2019	28
Okra and morning glory	Beginning of Spring in 2020--Spring Equinox of 2020--Pure Brightness of 2020--Beginning of Summer in 2020--Slight Heat of 2020--Great Heat of 2020	30
Rice	Early spring of 2019--Early summer of 2019--August of 2019--September of 2019	31
Red persimmon	Frost's Descent of 2020--Grain in Ear of 2020--Early winter of 2020--Light Snow of 2020--Heavy Snow of 2020	31
Corn	May of 2019--September of 2019	39
Black mushroom	2018—2019	48

a series of steps like threshing, basking, soaking and fermenting; the wheat grains turned into bread, fried dough twist, gluten, cold noodles, noodles, steamed bun with stuffing, Chinese hamburger and maltose served on the dining table. Such innovation of presentation presents

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the audience complete natural phenomena like spring sowing, autumn harvest, and flourishing and withering of trees and grass which originally could only be observed by peasants from a short distance, which allows the audience to obtain more real feelings and sense of involvement in the passage of time. By watching "The Life Series" videos, the modern people who have lived in cities and have been isolated from the nature for long can finally feel the integration of their living experience and law of nature for a short time, unleash their anxiety and pressure in life, and achieve the harmony between humans and ego and the nature at a higher level.

On the other hand, the unique expression of aesthetic image of 24 solar terms in "The Life Series" has also aroused the audience to reflect on the values and meanings of their life, which has reached the side of literary. In the videos, the 24 solar terms keep changing in cycle. The life cycles of plants are also repeated. The "time infinity" represented by these phenomena form a sharp contrast with the "finiteness of life" of people in real life, which has aroused the audience's life awareness. It can be found by analyzing the bullet screen and comments in "The Life Series" videos, many audiences are inclined to share with others their own living experience and prospect while watching the videos. Key words like "childhood", "feelings" and "longing" have appeared repeatedly in the comments. For example, in watching the video "The Life of Wheat", some audience recalled their excitement when eating "Dingding candy" in childhood, some audience shared their real experience in doing farm work, some audience introduced how cold noodles were eaten in their hometown, while some audience expressed their longing for the natural environment of the countryside, and described their ideal living state, etc,.All these different memories, experience and ideals are a very important part of their lives. Here, the audience have realized an emotional resonance with the natural rhythm in the videos. By sharing those wonderful or painful experience in their life, they have explored their spiritual being and pursued their life values. It can be said that the unique expression of aesthetic image of 24 solar terms in "The Life Series" of Li Ziqi has endowed the series of videos with a literary meaning, separated them from the form of products and made them literary works in real sense.

5. Conclusion

The aesthetic image of 24 solar terms is one of the most important time images in the videos of Li Ziqi, which have formed the cultural image in the videos along with other factors like space image and strongly aroused the cultural identity of the public. Around the aesthetic image of 24 solar terms in the videos of Li Ziqi, this paper elaborates three aspects, namely traditional connotations, specific applications and unique expression. This paper argues that as a supplement to the calendar, the 24 solar terms in essence are the outcome of humans' compliance with the law of nature, with the cultural connotations of harmony and unity. In the videos, Li Ziqi has reproduced the traditional cultural implications of 24 solar terms, and made an innovative expression in "The Life Series", which have not only shortened the distance between modern people and the nature, but more aroused people's pursuit of harmony between humans and nature and understanding of themselves and life. The success of the videos of Li Ziqi indicates the development of the society and howthe era changes, the cultural gene and memories flowing in the blood of Chinese people will remain unchanged. The longing and ultimate pursuit of Chinese people of harmony among "heaven, earth, humans" will remain unchanged. The cultural inheritance is consistent with the new development philosophies advocated by President Xi Jinping like "harmonious coexistence of humans and the nature", "respecting, complying with and protecting the nature".

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