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# Analysis of Chinese Citizens' Perception and Its Differences of City Spirit: A Case Study of Hefei City

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## ABSTRACT

City spirit is the soul of the city. The spread of city spirit not only could establish a civilized specimen for citizens, but also create a good cultural atmosphere for the city. Hefei residents' perception of city spirit is extensive, and most of Hefei citizens consider the expression words of city spirit are very appropriate, which is enlightened, open-minded, actual and innovative. A great majority of Hefei citizens the willing to support the propaganda and promotion of the city spirit, and they think the promotion of the city spirit plays a key role in the way of the city's development. In addition, significant differences in the perception of urban spirituality emerge among residents with different economic and social characteristics. There are four aspects of how to enhance the public perception of city spirit, which include increasing dissemination channels and means, strengthening guidance according to the difference of residents, encouraging participation of community residents, and building a good atmosphere depending on the city's advantages.

## 1. Introduction

The city spirit is a comprehensive response to the city's historical tradition, cultural accumulation, social atmosphere and civilization, which represent the city's image, highlighting the city's appearance and leading the future development of the city. The city spirit is also a compre-

hensive reflection of citizens' views on the legal system, public morality, folk customs and aesthetics, and plays an important role in shaping the tourism image of a city. According to Liu (2011), the urban spirit is the core element of urban civilization, the concentrated embodiment of urban soft power and inexhaustible resource of core competitiveness, and the main content of urban cultur-

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al personality<sup>[1]</sup>. Chen and Wei (2005) argue that urban aesthetics provides the theoretical basis for the shaping of Shanghai's urban spirit, while the process of shaping Shanghai's urban spirit also promotes the maturation and development of urban aesthetics<sup>[2]</sup>. Shi and Wei (2003) studied the historical and cultural characteristics of Hangzhou and their relationship with the new humanistic spirit and proposed that the humanistic spirit of Hangzhou originated from the historical and cultural traditions, and this humanistic spirit is the exquisite harmony and atmospheric openness, which has been the driving force of Hangzhou's social development for thousands of years<sup>[3]</sup>. Shen (2007) believes that the competitiveness of all countries and cities ultimately depends on the cultural spirit of the people, and that true modernization should be implemented in the modernization of people, the modernization of the spirit of the nation and its citizens<sup>[4]</sup>. The perception of urban spirit by citizens as urban subjects directly affects the effectiveness of urban spirit dissemination, but there is little literature on the perception of urban spirit by citizens.

Foreign research results on city spirit perception are relatively few, and some scholars mainly focus on the mental perception model of city image<sup>[5]</sup> and the differences between domestic and foreign tourists' perceptions to tourism cities<sup>[6]</sup>. These research results are somewhat different from the relevant domestic studies, and also have something to learn from. Based on the systematic analysis of the concept, connotation and role of urban spirit, this paper focuses on urban residents' perception of urban spirit, including familiarity with the expressions, recognition, willingness to support, and significance of dissemination, etc., through questionnaire surveys and statistical analysis, and proposes initiatives to improve the perception of urban spirit citizens, and the research findings have certain theoretical and practical values for shaping and dissemination of city spirit.

## **2. Methodology and Technology of the Study**

### **2.1 Case Study Area**

As the capital of Anhui Province China, Hefei is the political, economic and cultural center of the province, which has obvious geographical advantages, great potential for economic development, unique historical and cultural charm, and a distinctive urban temperament. Based on the extensive collection of social opinions, the participation of citizens in voting, and the selection of experts, the expression of Hefei city spirit was officially

determined as: "enlightened, open, seeking, innovative".

Hefei city spirit has its connotation, first of all, from the geographical point of view, Hefei in the middle of Anhui, east and west, even south and north, is the intersection of the Central Plains culture, Chu culture, Wu-Yue Culture, regional cultural characteristics for Hefei people to accept foreign things and compatible with all sides of the idea to provide the conditions, creating the Hefei open-minded city temperament, which emphasizes not being stubborn or conservative. Secondly, from the historical point of view, from the origin of the Hui merchants in the Ming Dynasty to Li Hongzhang, who implemented the "foreign affairs movement" in the Qing Dynasty, Hefei people have the notion of open-mindedness, openness is the temperament of the city of Hefei, Hefei is moving towards a regional megacity, the spirit of openness is more and more important. Again from the realm, "seeking" is the cultural cornerstone of the city's great development, construction and environment, Hefei chooses to seek the spirit of the city, it is from the reform and opening up, the development of the Yangtze River, the rise of the central practice of consensus. Finally, from the practical point of view, Hefei has always had the gene of innovation, Hefei has several Chinese or world firsts in the field of technological innovation, and still has rich scientific and educational resources, the essential of Huizhou business spirit is the spirit of thinking, change and innovation of Anhui people, innovation is the sinews and bones that support the prosperity of the city, and is the core of the city to leapfrog and catch up.

As a highly concentrated economic area and a place where human civilization is concentrated, the city is the center of regional politics, economy and culture. In recent years, as people pay more attention to cultural construction, more and more cities in China have started to cultivate "city spirit" as the cultural brand of the city, and to refine and publicize "city spirit" as an important city flag, which coalesces the ideological soul of a city, represents the overall image of a city, highlights the characteristics of a city, and leads the future development direction of city culture. Urban construction should not focus only on the modern production of material space, but ignore the shaping of urban spirit. Cities need to make good use of every existing urban space to make it more culturally magnetic, shared and livable, and enhance citizens' sense of belonging, participation and happiness<sup>[7]</sup>. It is based on the recognition of the importance of city spirit that many cities in China have now developed a unique combination of urban spirit expressions (Table 1).

**Table 1.** The city spirit expressions of some Chinese cities

City	City spirit expressions	City	City spirit expressions
<b>Beijing</b>	Patriotic, innovative, tolerant and virtuous	<b>Nanjing</b>	Open-mindedness, honesty and integrity, entrepreneurship and innovation
<b>Shanghai</b>	Fairness, Inclusion, Integrity, Responsibility	<b>Haerbin</b>	Honest and dedicated, harmonious and progressive
<b>Tianjin</b>	Patriotic, honest, pragmatic and innovative	<b>Hangzhou</b>	Exquisite and harmonious, open atmosphere
<b>Chongqin</b>	Climbing to the top and carrying the weight forward	<b>Jinan</b>	Integrity, Innovation, Harmony
<b>Huhehaote</b>	Stallion spirit, grassland temperament	<b>Nanchang</b>	openness, integrity, keep strength
<b>Changsha</b>	Concerned about the world, dare to be the first	<b>Wuhan</b>	Civilized, tolerant, resilient, innovative
<b>Yinchuan</b>	Strong and everlasting	<b>Guangzhou</b>	Pragmatism, truth-seeking, tolerance, openness, and innovation
<b>Hefei</b>	Open-minded, inquisitive and innovative	<b>Lanzhou</b>	Innovation, harmony and progress
<b>Changchun</b>	Tolerance and self-improvement	<b>Chengdu</b>	Harmony, tolerance, and integrity
<b>Zhengzhou</b>	Profound, open, innovative and harmonious	<b>Guiyang</b>	Knowing and acting, working together to be the first
<b>Taiyuan</b>	Compatible and Harmonious, Integrity and Excellence	<b>Kunming</b>	Spring melts everything, harmoniously, dares to be the first, pursues excellence

## 2.2 Data Collection and Study Design

In this paper, random stratified sampling was used to obtain the research data, and the questionnaire was designed to include citizens' familiarity with city spirit, recognition of city spirit, willingness to support the city spirit, and significance of communication. The values of "very supportive", "supportive", "average", "opposed" and "very opposed" are 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. A higher score value, means the residents are more supportive of the city spirit. The statistical data were mainly from the centralized interviews from May 5th to July 10th, 2019. The research interviews were conducted twice, mainly for the citizens of Hefei, and the questionnaires were distributed in city parks and residential areas with more than 1000 people. The respondents were all identified after two face-to-face screenings, and they were all sensitive to city spirit-related terms, and had a strong willingness to respond and express, and the total sample after excluding invalid data was 2897, with a valid sample rate of 94.8%, and the sample size and representativeness met the needs of the study.

After collecting the relevant data, SPSS19.0 statistical package was used to conduct the basic frequency analysis, chi-square test and other mathematical and statistical analyses of the relevant variables in order to study the descriptive statistical characteristics of the research subjects,

the reliability and validity of the sample data, the citizens' perception of urban spirit, the differences in the perception of city spirit among citizens with different characteristics, and to gain insight into the correlation between the variables of citizens' economic and social attributes and the differences in the perception of city spirit. The main objectives of the study were to reveal the factors influencing city spirit perception, provide a theoretical basis for improving city spirit perception, optimize urban tourism image, and enhance urban soft competitiveness.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Citizens' Perception of Hefei City Spirit

The ultimate purpose of city spirit release, propaganda and promotion are to influence citizens' behavior implicitly and to promote city culture and civilization construction. A good city spirit expression depends on city residents' understanding, recognition and support of the city spirit slogan. Judgment is made. According to the sample data of the sample survey, the survey method of Likert scale was used, and each question was rated according to "strongly agree", "agree", and "disagree". Higher scores indicate that residents are also more supportive the city spirit. The statistical analysis of citizens' perception of Hefei city spirit is as follows (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Analysis of citizens’ perception of Hefei city spirit

variables	Variable Description	Mean	Standard deviation	(%)
Familiarity of City Spirit	Very familiar with city spirit expressions	3.12	0.63	57.3
	Partial understanding of city spirit expression	4.58	0.37	89.4
	Have no idea of city spirit expression	2.14	0.65	46.7
Recognition of City Spirit	The city spirit is very expressed aptly	4.63	0.35	91.2
	City spirit expressions are partially similar	4.10	0.52	85.5
	The expression of city spirit is not very appropriate	2.15	0.62	35.8
Willingness to support the City Spirit	Very supportive of city spirit promotion	4.34	0.28	90.1
	Support city spirit promotion as long as it is available	3.67	0.43	78.5
	Reluctance to support city spirit promotion	1.58	0.49	27.6
Significance of City Spirit	Beneficial to improve the visibility of the city	4.39	0.31	89.5
	Beneficial to the improvement of urban civilization	4.20	0.42	90.3
	Beneficial to the promotion of social harmony	4.52	0.38	87.6
	Little impact on urban development	2.56	0.64	35.6

### 3.2.1 Familiarity of City Spirit

In the face of the government-led activities of collecting, releasing and promoting the city spirit expressions, many citizens and organizations are involved in them, and they are familiar with the city spirit expressions to some extent, the greater the degree of familiarity the citizens perceive, and the more familiar the citizens are with the city spirit, the more conducive to the proliferation and influence of the city spirit. On the whole, the citizens of Hefei are familiar with the city spirit, and the proportion of those who “know part of the expression of the city spirit” is the highest (mean and approval rates are 4.58 and 89.4%, respectively), followed by those who are “very familiar with the expression of the city spirit” (mean and ap-

proval rate are 3.5 and 78.6%, respectively). The proportion of those who are “not familiar with the expressions of city spirit” is smaller (mean and approval rates are 2.14 and 46.7%, respectively). Increasing familiarity with city spirit is a long-term task, and measures can be taken to increase dissemination channels and create cultural brands.

### 3.2.2 Recognition of City Spirit

The city spirit is the condensation of the mainstream consciousness of the city culture<sup>[8]</sup>. Most of the expressions of city spirit are formally released and publicized to the society after a long period of gestation, community-wide solicitation, and multi-faceted revision, therefore, a more satisfactory proposal is obtained. The public’s approval of

the city spirit expressions is reflected in whether they think the expressions aptly summarize the city's history, culture, temperament, economy, and other elements. Hefei's city spirit expressions were recognized by most citizens, and the summary was relatively concise, with "the city spirit is very relevant" (mean value and approval rate were 4.63 and 91.2%, respectively) scoring much higher than "the city spirit is not very relevant" (The mean value and approval rate are 2.15 and 35.8% respectively), and the perceived consistency of the recognition of the city spirit is strong (the standard deviation of "very relevant" is 0.35), while some people think that some of the expressions are similar to other cities (mean value and approval rate are 4.10 and 85.5%), which needs to be improved and optimized.

### 3.2.3 Willingness to Support the City Spirit

The citizens are the ambassadors of the city, the citizens are the best disseminators of the city spirit, and the good words and actions of the citizens are the best interpretation of the city spirit. The higher the citizens' willingness to support the city spirit, the more they are willing to participate in shaping the city spirit, and the more conducive to expanding the influence of the city spirit. The mean value of "very supportive of city spirit" propaganda is 4.34, and the approval rate is 90.1%; the mean value of "supportive of city spirit propaganda as long as conditions allow" is 3.67, and the approval rate is 78.5%. On the other hand, the mean value of "unwilling to support city spirit propaganda" is 1.58, and the approval rate is 27.6%, both of which have lower scores. Creating conditions and strengthening community participation could make more citizens understand the meaning of city spirit is conducive to increase public support.

### 3.2.4 Significance of City Spirit

On the one hand, the propagation of the city spirit itself can stimulate citizens to think about the connotation of the city spirit, on the other hand, the propagation of city spirit also plays a role in promoting the construction of city civilization in reality, and effectively changes the spiritual and civilized appearance of the city. Hefei citizens have a positive perception of the significance of the dissemination of city spirit, and the scores of the three positive variables are all high, with the mean values of "conducive to improving the city's popularity", "conducive to improving the city's civilization", and "conducive to promoting social harmony" are 4.39, 4.20, and 4.52, and the approval rates are 89.5%, 90.3%, and 87.6%, respectively, while the mean value of "not significant for urban development" is 2.56, and the approval rate is 35.6%, all with lower scores.

## 3.2 Differences of Citizens' Perception to City Spirit

The chi-square test based on urban residents' perceptions of urban spirituality is not only useful for determining the influencing factors of urban spirituality perception differences, but also for understanding the distribution of perception differences among different types of urban residents, and then for formulating perception improvement strategies. The results showed that the significance level of the chi-square test of urban spirituality perception of residents with different economic and social characteristics was less than 0.05, so the original hypothesis of the chi-square test was rejected, and the economic and social variables such as gender (0.001), age (0.000), education level (0.001), income level (0.001), and occupation type (0.002) of urban residents were found to be significantly related to urban spirituality perception. These economic and social variables are all influential factors in the difference in city spirit perceptions. Urban management departments need to fully consider the influence of these variables and propose targeted countermeasures based on the analysis of the influence mechanism to improve the perception and support of city spirit among local residents.

The proportion of "high perception" urban residents is greater than that of "medium perception" and "low perception" urban residents. Taking the "high perception" option as an example, the perception of women (50.34%) is higher than that of men (43.25%), indicating that female residents have a higher potential to support city spirit. In terms of the difference in the perception of different age groups, "30-39 years old" (42.88%) have a higher perception of city spirit. (42.88%), followed by "20-29 years old" (38.12%) and "20 years old and below" (37.25%). Residents with higher education levels are more concerned about the spirit of the city, with "undergraduate" (46.90%), "college" (46.33%), and "graduate and above" (45.287%) ranking in the top three in terms of perception. Residents with higher average monthly income also have higher perceptions, residents with "monthly income of CNY 6,000-7,999" (40.34%) having the highest perception, followed by residents with "a monthly income of CNY 5,000-5,999" (38.42%) and "a monthly income of CNY 5,000-5,999" (38.42%) and "more than CNY 8,000" (37.32%); among the types of occupation, "civil servants" (42.11%), "others" (38.94%) have relatively higher perceptions of city spirit. In addition, residents with high scores on the "high perception" option have relatively low scores on the "medium perception" and "low perception" options, which means that the scores of the same category of residents on the perception variables are mutually coupled (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Residents’ perception differences to the city spirit by their socio-economic characteristics

Demographic characteristics		n	Perception to city spirit			$\chi^2$	Sig.
			High perception	Medium perception	Low perception		
			Percentage (%)				
Gender	male	1326	43.25	30.33	26.42	5.238	0.001
	female	1571	50.34	33.18	16.48		
Age	≤20	271	37.25	36.53	26.22	4.164	0.000
	20—29	549	38.12	33.21	28.67		
	30—39	543	42.88	31.27	25.85		
	40—49	498	34.84	49.54	15.62		
	50—59	474	30.22	43.08	26.70		
	≥60	562	31.18	37.23	31.59		
Education level	Middle school or below	88	38.22	46.47	15.31	5.987	0.001
	High school	346	44.75	42.54	12.71		
	College	930	46.33	36.18	17.49		
	Undergraduate	775	46.90	34.62	18.48		
	Graduate	758	45.27	28.43	26.30		
Average monthly revenue (CNY)	≥8000	576	37.32	36.77	25.91	4.021	0.001
	6000—7999	859	40.34	29.66	30.00		
	5000—5999	904	38.42	32.15	29.43		
	3000—4999	427	36.54	35.43	28.03		
	2000—2999	116	31.54	44.76	23.70		
	≤1999	15	31.23	43.75	25.02		
Occupations	Civil Servant	302	42.11	32.40	25.49	2.365	0.002
	Enterprises	396	38.77	32.87	28.36		
	Servant industry workers	446	38.65	34.65	26.70		
	Commercial staff	275	37.62	35.77	26.61		
	students	623	35.63	38.65	25.72		
	Retired	187	56.23	22.07	21.70		
	others	399	35.14	34.87	29.99		
		269	38.94	35.58	25.48		

Significance level  $p < 0.05$ .

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1 The Differentiation of Residents’ Perception to City Spirit

In China, provincial capitals pay much attention to the shaping and promotion of city image, especially city spirit is seen as an important part of city culture and city image. The spirit of the city is the soul of the city. Lewis Mumford pointed out that the city has the function of magnet first and then the function of container<sup>[9]</sup>. This magnet function in a certain sense refers to the cultural attractiveness and spiritual centripetal force of the city, and the perception of city spirit by city residents as the main body

of the city directly determines the effect of city spirit dissemination.

This paper selects four perceptual variables, which include citizens’ familiarity with the city spirit, recognition of city spirit, willingness to support for city spirit, and significance of dissemination of the spirit. Hefei is a famous historical and cultural city in China, with high economic growth and rising living standards the people in recent years, the citizens have a high perception of the city spirit, and the government has strongly promoted and publicized the city spirit, which has greatly stimulated the pride and spiritual motivation of the citizens.

According to the results of mathematical statistics, this paper shows that there are certain group differences

in urban residents' perceptions of city spirit. Female citizens, highly educated citizens, high-income groups, middle-aged and young residents, and government workers are the right types of citizens who have higher perceptions and satisfaction with city spirit. This means that the process of designing, publicizing and promoting the spirit of the city needs to take full account of the economic and social attributes of the residents. These findings have strong guiding significance for further targeted enhancement of citizens' perception of city spirit.

## **4.2 Measures to Enhance Citizen Perception of City Spirit**

City spirit is a highly condensed version of a city's economy, society, culture and history. Only when the city spirit is known and recognized by more citizens, the information and concepts conveyed by the city spirit will be transformed into behavioral motivation and play a role in promoting social harmony and civilization progress. Combined with the above analysis of the characteristics of Hefei citizens' perception of the city spirit, the main measures to enhance the perception of the city spirit in Hefei are reflected in the following aspects. In order to improve the overall perceived level of urban spirit and fully consider the factors influencing the difference in urban spirit perception, we can enhance the urban spirit perception of citizens with low perception from the perspectives of policy incentive, publicity and education, and community participation, and promote the transformation of citizens with low perception types to high perception types.

### **4.2.1 Enrich the Carrier and Increase the Channels**

The main media include TV, radio, newspapers, outdoor media, the internet, etc. Although the proportion of Hefei citizens who know about the city spirit is high and the proportion of people who "know nothing about the city spirit" is small (many of them are foreigners), it is necessary to continue to enrich the dissemination carriers and increase the publicity channels to expand the familiarity of the city spirit. From the perspective of the long-term dissemination strategy of the city spirit, it is necessary to continue to enrich the dissemination carriers, increase the publicity channels, expand the familiarity of the citizens with the city spirit, such as adding the expression of the city spirit slogans on the packaging of enterprise products, so that consumers can feel the city spirit while shopping, carrying out special publicity in the main buildings and public places of the city, regularly carrying out the exhibition of the results of the dissemination of the city spirit, and forming the impression that the city spirit is every-

where. We can strengthen the city culture, improve and optimize the city environment, and increase the citizens' sense of belonging to the city.

### **4.2.2 Focus on Differences and Strengthen Guidance**

There are many reasons for the differences in the perception of urban spirituality among citizens with different demographic characteristics. For example, there are differences in thinking styles by gender, differences in cognitive abilities by education level, and differences in the ability to understand the city by occupation type and income level. In order to increase citizens' acceptance, appreciation and recognition of the city spirit, two aspects are very important: one is to "speak with one voice", to build the city spirit as a long-term project, to form perceptual inertia, and to strengthen citizens' psychological perception. The other is to pay attention to the variations of different groups of citizens. Strengthen the guidance, and take targeted publicity measures to improve the effect of spreading the city spirit, for example, civil servants and students have the most significant knowledge in the city spirit. We can improve people's cognition in city spirit through differentiated ideas and measures.

### **4.2.3 Community Engagement for Greater Impact**

City spirit is the cultural symbol of a city, which come from history and is rooted in people's lives. The best city spirit penetrates into citizens' lives and becomes part of their cultural lives, and such city spirit is relevant to citizens' psychological distance. Therefore, enhancing the perception of the city spirit requires strengthening community participation so that the city spirit melts into the subjective consciousness of citizens and influences their daily habits. Enriching and expanding community activities, arts and culture activities, and campus activities with the theme of city spirit will not only make the already formed city spirit known to citizens, but also loved and recognized by them. Citizens who implicitly feel the role of city spirit in participating activities are influenced by city spirit, and they are more willing to support the promotion of city spirit. For example, the greening and beautification of Hefei's Ring City Park provide a platform for the dissemination of the city spirit, and the special promotion of the city spirit in this civic park enables citizens to enhance their pride in the city, and everyone becomes an ambassador and propagandist of the city spirit.

### **4.2.4 Reinforcing Advantages and Creating an Atmosphere**

The dissemination of city spirit has a very important

significance. The city spirit not only unites people and establishes an integrated city image, but also creates a good environment for the development of the city, it makes the city image more individual and leads the development direction of the city<sup>[10]</sup>. At the same time, it is also a systematic project of shaping and disseminating of the city spirit, which requires maximizing the advantages of the city by using modern means<sup>[11,12]</sup>. It takes long-term efforts to truly cultivate a city spirit with regional characteristics through the formation of the city's cultural brand, for example, Hefei can take advantage of cultural resources such as universities and animation bases to collect and create a number of animation works, movies and plays reflecting the city spirit of Hefei, so as to turn the city spirit of Hefei into cultural products with thematic characteristics. In the process of construction of the city's spiritual civilization, the city spirit can be used as a highlight for urban marketing and image dissemination.

### **Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest.

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