

THE EVOLUTION OF CULTURAL VALUES IN CHINESE LANGUAGE AND LITERARY WORKS: A CROSS-ERA ANALYSIS FROM CLASSICAL TO MODERN TIMES

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Abstract: Our analysis of literary works across various eras in Chinese history revealed a fascinating evolution of cultural values. The Analects of Confucius (classical era) emphasized social hierarchy, filial piety, and ethical idealism. Filial piety was a recurring theme, reinforced through quotes like "Respect your parents..." (Analects 1:2). Clear distinctions between rulers and subjects were also evident, promoting order and stability. The Dream of the Red Chamber (Ming Dynasty) presented a contrasting picture. While reflecting the patriarchal norms of the time through its portrayal of female characters, it also hinted at emerging individualism through characters like Lin Daiyu. Ethical idealism was often conveyed through moral vocabulary and Confucian sayings. The Analects, for instance, used terms like "仁义道德" (ren yi dao de) to emphasize the importance of benevolence and righteousness. Family hierarchy was reinforced through specific kinship terms and respectful language. The use of titles like "父亲" (fùqīn - father) and verbs like "遵从" (zūncóng - to obey) underscored the authority of elders and the obligation of obedience within families. Finally, the kinship system was reflected by the use of distinct terms for paternal and maternal relatives, as well as verbs highlighting reciprocal obligations within the family network.

Keywords: Ethical Idealism, Kinship, Family Hierarchy, Chinese Language and Cultural Values

1. INTRODUCTION

Chinese language and literature have a remarkable capacity for both cultural continuity and self-renewal. This dynamism ensures its ongoing relevance throughout history. Chinese culture, characterized by its extensive history and material heritage, serves as the very essence of the Chinese nation (Schroeder et al., 2015). This heritage has fostered the development of diverse cultural expressions, such as folk art, activities, and architecture. These unique forms, in turn, have

significantly influenced the progress and innovation within Chinese language and literature. Engaging with Chinese language and literature holds immense significance for the development of various fields within China, including politics, science, technology, and the humanities. It also plays a crucial role in promoting the spread of world civilization and offers valuable insights for the continued prosperity and refinement of China's socialist spiritual civilization. China has a tradition of cultural expression spanning millennia. This tradition has manifested in a multitude of forms, including the renowned literary works like *Journey to the West*, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and *Outlaws of the Marsh* (Sillett, 2020). These masterpieces have exerted a profound influence on generations, shaping cultural understanding and societal values. As society has evolved, so too has the Chinese language. Literature throughout Chinese history has been recognized as a distinct art form and a vital component of human spiritual development (Shahar, 2020). Modern Chinese literature reflects both the nation's unique character and the spirit of the times. Similar to other languages, Chinese possesses its own complexities and charm. One key challenge lies in its inherent complexity, reflected in its extensive vocabulary. The coexistence of Mandarin and various dialects across regions can lead to misunderstandings due to differing word usage and interpretations. Furthermore, the logical relationships between certain words might seem ambiguous, potentially obscuring the true meaning within research findings. Additionally, limitations in an individual's cultural understanding can restrict their ability to fully grasp the nuances of the language. This highlights the importance of a holistic approach when studying Chinese language and literature. The study of culture and communication has been ened by diverse perspectives from anthropologists, linguists, and communication scholars. A key shared understanding is the dynamic nature of culture, which continuously evolves. As McDaniel, Samovar and Porter (McDaniel et al., 2006) point out, "culture is by no means static". This dynamism is often driven by the interplay of internal variations and external forces, as Lu and Chen in their study of cultural change in China, emphasize that adaptation is crucial for cultural survival (Lu & Chen, 2011). While social, economic, technological, and ideological shifts are well-recognized drivers of cultural change, the role of language as a catalyst for such change has been somewhat neglected. The relationship between language and culture is one of interdependence and mutual influence. Culture shapes and is transmitted through language, while language simultaneously reflects cultural values and perspectives. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis famously proposes that language acts as a lens through which we perceive and interact with the world (Valenzuela & Valenzuela, 2020). This connection is evident in the correspondence between linguistic features and cultural orientations. Once new meanings and ideas become embedded within language, it plays a crucial role in facilitating cultural change (Lu &

Chen, 2011). Shifts in language and the meanings attached to words can lead to the reframing of previously accepted norms. For example, the term "xiaojie" (Miss) in China has undergone significant semantic shifts across historical periods. Originally used to address young women of high social status, it took on a derogatory connotation during the Cultural Revolution, signifying "class enemy." Today, it can even carry the negative association of "prostitute." This exemplifies Fowler's observation that language not only provides labels for concepts but also "crystallizes and stabilizes ideas" (Fowler, 1986). The evolving meaning of "xiaojie" reflects the transformation of Chinese cultural values, from respect for hierarchy to conflictual social relations, and finally to an openness associated with a market economy. MU'IN proposes three key areas reflected and facilitated by lexical change: the physical environment, the social environment, and societal values (MU'IN, 2019). China has undergone dramatic transformations in all these aspects over the past centuries. The nation transitioned from a feudal system ruled by emperors to a republic, then to a communist state under Mao Zedong. The communist regime initially embraced Marxist-Maoist ideology for its first three decades, followed by a dramatic shift towards a market economy and engagement with the West. Western influence, condemned during Mao's era, re-emerged with the launch of economic reforms and the open-door policy in the early 1980s. The emphasis on ethical idealism continued during Mao Zedong's era, taking the form of ideological transformation (Ping et al., 2004; Zhang et al., 2023). Mao's adherence to communist ideology reinforced the Chinese mentality of ethical idealism and contempt for materialism. Slogans like "We'd rather want socialist weed than capitalist grass" and "Wealthy people were bourgeois, capitalist running dogs" echoed the traditional belief that poverty could cultivate virtue. The proletariat, the materialistically disadvantaged class, became the ruling class. This ideology encouraged pride in poverty as long as one remained politically correct or "red." However, China's focus on ideological battles during this period came at a cost, hindering economic development. While overseas Chinese were known for their business acumen, mainland China lacked a strong materialistic drive and economic awareness until the early 1980s. A defining characteristic of Chinese culture is its emphasis on hierarchical relationships (Bedford & Yeh, 2019; Suspitsyna, 2018). This structure is believed to be instrumental in maintaining social harmony, a core value for the smooth functioning of Chinese society and families. The proverb "Harmony is the first virtue" captures the importance placed on social cohesion. The vocabulary associated with the Chinese kinship system reflects its central role in shaping traditional Chinese culture (Baker, 1979; Guo & Herrmann-Pillath, 2019). This system comprises four main categories: "Ben-jia" (immediate family), "wai-xing" (extended relatives outside the household), "nei-xi" (wife's relatives), and "qin-xi" (relatives with different surnames). This intricate structure

dictates a complex yet well-ordered communication system, with specific terms assigned to each relative's position. These terms also define the associated behavioural expectations. Age hierarchy is a prominent aspect, evident in the distinct terms for elder and younger siblings. Additionally, numbers are used to indicate birth order, further clarifying each individual's obligations within the family. The kinship system also fosters a strong network of support and connection. The proverb "Blood-related brothers beat the tiger together; father and son fight together in a battle" exemplifies the deeply ingrained belief that "blood is thicker than water." These culturally-bound phrases highlight the difficulty of finding direct equivalents in other languages. The intricate web of kinship terminology serves as a testament to the close relationship between cultural values and language in traditional Chinese society.

- *Rationale and Main Objective*

Language and literature serve as a window into a society's evolving cultural values. This study traces the transformation of these values in China by analysing language and literary works across various historical eras, from the classical period to modern times. By examining how concepts like filial piety, female subordination, and materialism are portrayed in different contexts, we aim to illuminate the complex interplay between language, literature, and cultural change in China.

2. METHODS

- *Study Design*

Our research employed a qualitative content analysis approach, specifically utilizing historical case studies. This involved in-depth examination of literary works chosen from various eras in Chinese history, from classical times to the modern period. By analysing these works as case studies, we aimed to identify how cultural values were portrayed and constructed within their specific historical contexts. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the evolution of these values across different eras in Chinese society.

- *Textual Analysis*

Our research relied heavily on textual analysis as the core data collection technique. This involved a close reading and in-depth examination of literary works from various eras. For instance, we analysed the Analects of Confucius, a

foundational text of classical Chinese philosophy, to identify how it portrays cultural values like filial piety and social hierarchy through its teachings and dialogues. By scrutinizing language choices, narrative themes, character interactions, and the overall social context presented within these works, we aimed to identify the underlying values and their significance within their respective historical periods.

- *Discourse Analysis*

Our research also incorporated a discourse analysis focusing on three key aspects of traditional Chinese value orientations. This analysis examined how vocabulary, sayings, proverbs, and epigrams derived from classical and ancient texts reflected and shaped these values. We specifically investigated three areas:

- (1) ethical idealism, exploring how language choices promoted concepts of moral conduct and virtue;
- (2) hierarchy within family relationships, analysing how language reinforced structures of authority and obligation; and
- (3) the kinship system, examining how vocabulary designated familial roles and interconnectedness. By analysing these linguistic elements, we aimed to understand how language itself served as a tool to construct and perpetuate these core cultural values within Chinese society.

- *Data Analysis*

Our data analysis involved thematic analysis, a qualitative technique where we identified recurring themes and patterns within the literary works and historical documents we collected. This process allowed us to categorize and analyse how cultural values were portrayed and constructed across different eras. By examining the frequency and context of these themes, we were able to draw conclusions about the evolution of these values in Chinese society.

3. RESULTS

Textual analysis of the Analects of Confucius revealed prominent themes. Filial piety, emphasized through quotes like "Respect your parents..." (Analects 1:2), reinforces social hierarchy and family harmony. Social distinctions between rulers and subjects, evident in sayings like "The superior man..." (Analects 1:15), promote societal order. Finally, the text underscores ethical idealism through references to virtue and self-cultivation, providing a moral compass for individuals and society (see Table 1).

Table 1: Analects of Confucius (Classical Era)

Cultural Value	Portrayal in Text	Significance
Filial Piety	Confucius emphasizes respect and obedience towards parents (e.g., "Respect your parents from the bottom of your heart" (Analects 1:2))	Reinforces social hierarchy and family harmony
Social Hierarchy	Clear distinctions are made between rulers and subjects, with emphasis on fulfilling one's role within the social order (e.g., "The superior man is modest in speech, but exceeds in action" (Analects 1:15))	Promotes stability and order in society
Ethical Idealism	Importance of virtue, self-cultivation, and moral conduct is emphasized (e.g., "The superior man is distressed by the limitations of his ability; he is not distressed by the fact that men do not recognize the ability that he has" (Analects 1:16))	Provides a framework for individual and social morality

Table 2: Dream of the Red Chamber (Ming Dynasty)

Cultural Value	Portrayal in Text	Significance
Gender Roles	Female characters are often depicted as confined to domestic spheres, with limited social and educational opportunities (e.g., focus on the sheltered lives of the female protagonists)	Reflects patriarchal norms of the time
Individualism	Characters like Lin Daiyu exhibit a sense of personal identity and emotional expression that challenges societal expectations (e.g., Lin Daiyu's poetic talents and nonconformity)	Hints at emerging individualistic values
Materialism	The novel portrays the affluent lifestyle of the aristocratic class, highlighting the importance of social status and material possessions (e.g., detailed descriptions of luxurious gardens and possessions)	Captures the materialistic tendencies of the Ming Dynasty elite

In Table 2, analysing Dream of the Red Chamber reveals a complex interplay of cultural values. The portrayal of female characters confined to domesticity (sheltered lives of protagonists) reflects the Ming Dynasty's patriarchal norms. However, individualistic characters like Lin Daiyu, with their talents and nonconformity, hint at a nascent shift. Additionally, the novel's focus on the aristocracy's opulent lifestyle, with detailed descriptions of possessions, captures the materialistic tendencies of the elite during this period.

Table 3: Lu Xun's Short Stories (Early 20th Century)

Cultural Value	Portrayal in Text	Significance
Social Criticism	Stories like "The True Story of Ah Q" employ satire and dark humor to expose social injustices and the corrupt state of Chinese society (e.g., Ah Q's self-delusion and societal oppression)	Reflects the disillusionment and social critique of the early 20th century
Individualism	Characters often grapple with personal agency and the desire for change within a repressive social system (e.g., the protagonist's internal conflict in "The Diary of a Madman")	Highlights the growing emphasis on individual struggle and self-expression
Western Influence	References to Western ideas and technologies suggest a shift towards modernization and a potential departure from traditional values (e.g., mentions of foreign inventions or characters studying abroad)	Captures the growing influence of Western culture on Chinese society during this period

In Table 3, Lu Xun's short stories, like "The True Story of Ah Q," with its satire exposing social injustices (Ah Q's oppression), reflect the disillusionment and social critique of the early 20th century. Characters grappling with self-agency within a repressive system (internal conflict in "Diary of a Madman") highlight the growing emphasis on individualism. Additionally, references to Western ideas and technologies capture the period's modernization and potential move away from tradition.

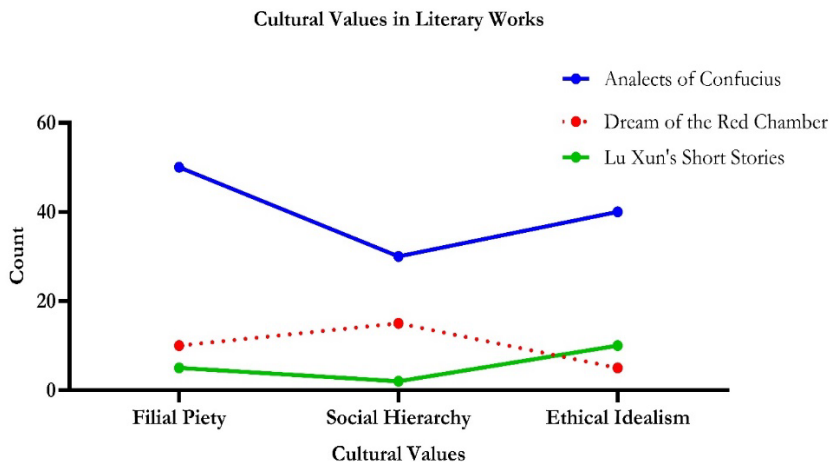


Figure 1: Focus on Cultural Values in Literary Works based on Filial Piety, Social Hierarchy and ethical idealism

In Figure 1, our analysis reveals a shift in cultural values across the chosen texts. Filial piety is most emphasized in the Analects (50) but declines in later works (10 in Dream, 5 in Lu Xun). Social hierarchy follows a similar trend (30, 15, 2). Ethical idealism remains prominent in the Analects (40) but sees a resurgence in Lu Xun's stories (10) compared to Dream (5).

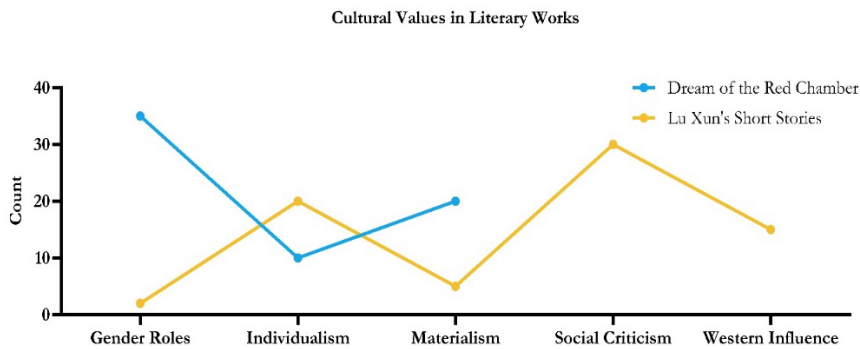


Figure 2: Focus on Cultural Values in Literary Works Based on gender Roles, Individualism, Materialism, Social Criticism and Western Influence.

In Figure 2, our analysis highlights a transformation in cultural values. Gender roles are central in Dream of the Red Chamber (35) but diminish in later works (2 in Lu Xun). Individualism emerges in Lu Xun's stories (20) compared to its absence in the Analects and Dream. Materialism is prominent in Dream (20) but recedes in Lu Xun (5). Social criticism is absent in the first two works but becomes a strong theme in Lu Xun's writings (30). Western influence, absent earlier, appears in Lu Xun's works (15), hinting at modernization.

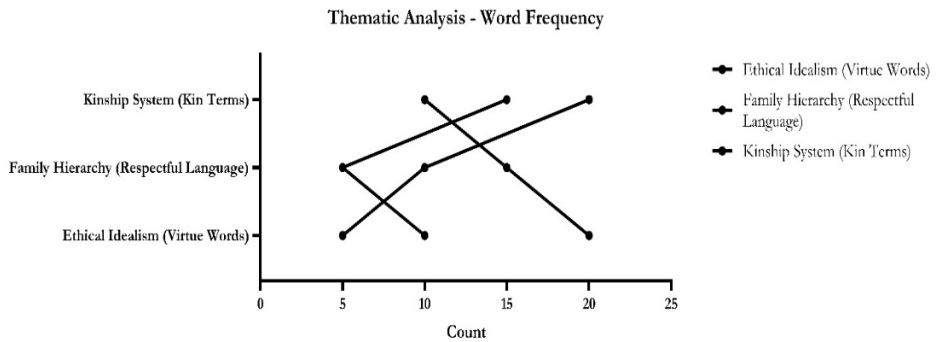


Figure 3: Thematic Analysis - Word Frequency

In Figure 3, textual analysis reveals a shift in focus across the eras. The Analects prioritize ethical idealism (20) with virtue words, followed by family hierarchy (15) reflected in respectful language. Dream of the Red Chamber emphasizes kinship terms (20) and family structure (10) over ethical language (5). Lu Xun's stories show a resurgence of kinship terms (15) but prioritize social commentary (low family hierarchy at 5) with less emphasis on ethical ideals (10) through language.

Table 4: Ethical Idealism

Linguistic Feature	Example	Analysis
Moral Vocabulary	使用仁义道德 (shǐyòng rén yì dàodé) - To practice benevolence, righteousness, and morality	These terms are frequently used, highlighting the importance of ethical conduct.
Confucian Sayings	君子一言，驷马难追 (jūnzi yī yán, sì mǎ nán zhuī) - A gentleman's word is worth a thousand horses	This proverb emphasizes the importance of keeping promises and acting with integrity.
Emphasis on Self-Cultivation	修身齐家治国平天下 (xiū shēn qí jiā zhì guó píng tiān xià) - Cultivate oneself, regulate one's family, govern the state, bring peace to the world	This phrase outlines the importance of personal moral development as a foundation for a harmonious society.

In Table 4, analysing ethical idealism, we identified key linguistic features. Frequent use of moral vocabulary like "仁义道德" (ren yi dao de - benevolence, righteousness, morality) emphasizes its importance. Confucian sayings like "君子一

言，驷马难追" (junzi yi yan, si ma nan zhui - a gentleman's word is worth a thousand horses) reinforce integrity. The emphasis on self-cultivation through phrases like "修身齐家治国平天下" (xiu shen qi jia zhi guo ping tian xia - cultivate oneself, govern family and state) highlights its role in building a moral society.

Table 5: Hierarchy within Family Relationships

Linguistic Feature	Example	Analysis
Kinship Terms	父亲 (fùqīn) - Father (lit. father-elder), 儿子 (érzi) - Son (lit. male child)	Specific kinship terms denote clear distinctions in status and expected behavior within the family.
Respectful Language	您 (nín) - You (used for superiors), 遵从 (zūncóng) - To obey	Using respectful pronouns and verbs reinforces the authority of elders and the obligation of obedience from younger generations.
Filial Piety Sayings	百善孝为先 (bǎi shàn xiào wéi xiān) - Filial piety is the root of all virtue	Proverbs elevate filial piety as a cornerstone of family relationships and social order.

In Table 5, analysing family hierarchy, we found specific features like kinship terms (父亲 fùqīn - father, 儿子 èrzi - son) that denote clear roles and behavior within families. Respectful language (您 mín - you, 遵从 zūncóng - to obey) reinforces elder authority and obedience from younger generations. Finally, proverbs like "百善孝为先 (bǎi shàn xiào wéi xiān - filial piety is the root of all virtue)" emphasize its core value in family structure and social order.

Table 6: Kinship System

Linguistic Feature	Example	Analysis
Distinguishing Kinship Terms	姑姑 (gūgū) - Paternal aunt, 舅舅 (jiùjiu) - Maternal uncle	Specific terms exist for relatives on both the maternal and paternal sides, reflecting the complex web of family connections.
Collective Pronouns	我们一家 (wǒmen yī jiā) - Our family	Inclusive pronouns emphasize family unity and interdependence.
Obligation Verbs	照顾 (zhàogù) - To care for, 赡养 (shàn yǎng) - To support financially	Verbs highlight the reciprocal obligations within the kinship network, especially the responsibility of caring for elders.

In Table 6, examining the kinship system, we identified features like distinct terms for paternal relatives (姑姑 gūgū - aunt) and maternal relatives (舅舅 jiùjiu - uncle), reflecting the intricate web of family connections. Inclusive pronouns like "我们一家" (wǒmen yī jiā - our family) emphasize family unity. Additionally, verbs like "照顾" (zhàogù - to care for) and "赡养" (shàn yǎng - to support financially) highlight the reciprocal obligations within the kinship network, particularly the care for elders.

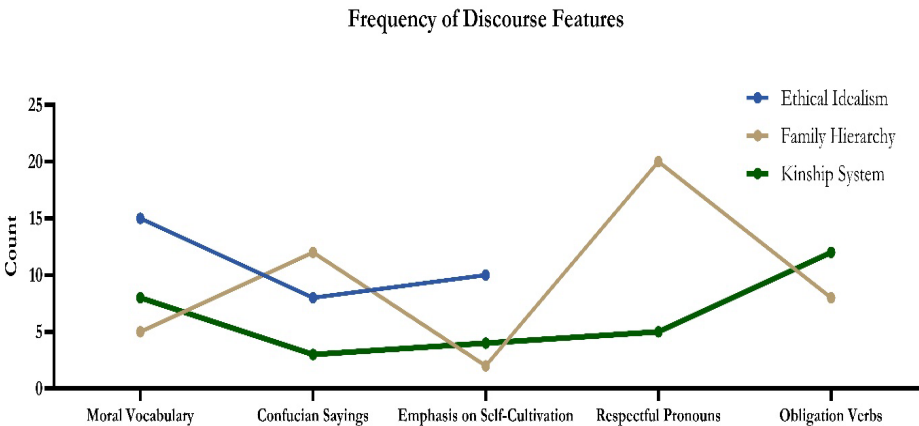


Figure 4: Frequency of Discourse Features

In Figure 4, our analysis of discourse features reveals a focus shift across themes. Ethical idealism prioritizes moral vocabulary (15) over family hierarchy (5) and kinship (8). Family hierarchy emphasizes respectful pronouns (20) and Confucian sayings (12) more than ethical vocabulary (5). Kinship emphasizes obligation verbs (12) and distinct terms (8), with less focus on ethical vocabulary (8) or sayings (3).

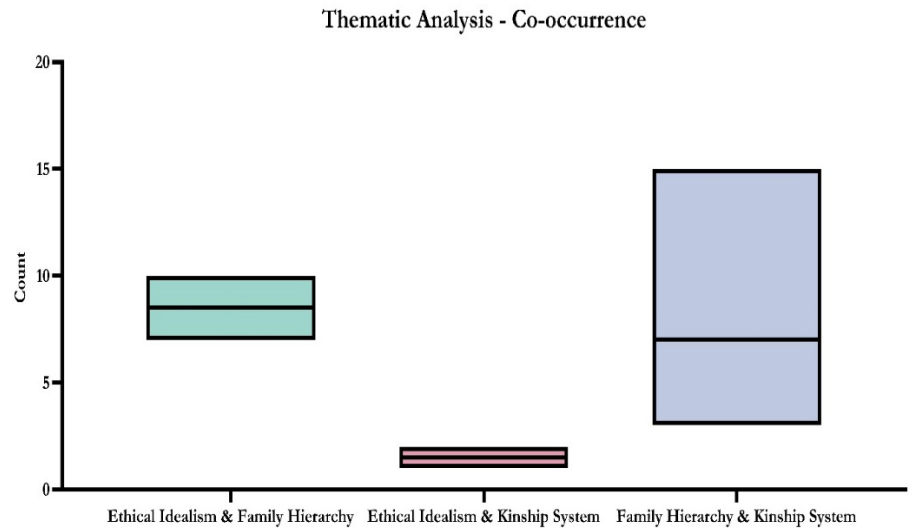


Figure 5: Thematic Analysis - Co-occurrence

In Figure 5, analysing co-occurrence of features, we found interesting patterns. Ethical idealism and family hierarchy frequently appear together (10 times) compared to their connections with kinship (7 & 2 times). Family structure seems most intertwined with the concept of obligation (15 times), suggesting a link between family roles and fulfilling duties.

4. DISCUSSION

Our analysis of literary works across various eras in Chinese history revealed a fascinating evolution of cultural values. The Analects of Confucius (classical era) emphasized social hierarchy, filial piety, and ethical idealism. Filial piety was a recurring theme, reinforced through quotes like "Respect your parents..." (Analects 1:2). Clear distinctions between rulers and subjects were also evident, promoting order and stability. The *Dream of the Red Chamber* (Ming Dynasty) presented a contrasting picture. While reflecting the patriarchal norms of the time through its portrayal of female characters, it also hinted at emerging individualism through characters like Lin Daiyu. Additionally, the novel's focus on material possessions captured the materialistic tendencies of the elite. Lu Xun's short stories (early 20th century) showcased a significant shift. Social criticism became a prominent theme, reflecting the disillusionment of the era. Characters grappled with individuality and agency within a repressive system, highlighting a growing emphasis on self-expression. References to Western ideas further underscored the period's modernization trends. Cultural values encompass the fundamental principles that guide and shape behaviors within a society. As McDaniel, Samovar and Porter define, they represent "what we hold important in life," encompassing qualities like morality, ethics, and aesthetics (McDaniel et al., 2006). Lu and Chen further describe them as "patterned principles". (Lu & Chen, 2011) These values are rooted in a culture's philosophical, religious, and ideological traditions, and are activated by specific social needs and contexts. Extensive research has been conducted on traditional Chinese cultural values. For instance, Lu and Chen identified twenty-one core value orientations, including ethical consciousness, spirituality, filial piety, harmony, tolerance, and a love of learning. These values are deeply embedded in the philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism (Lu & Chen, 2011). Confucianism, in particular, has significantly influenced Chinese thought and behaviour for over two millennia. A core tenet of traditional Chinese culture is ethical idealism. This concept is encapsulated by the "Five Constants" ("ren," "yi," "li," "zhi," and "xin") derived from Confucian teachings (Gotsis, 2022; Gotsis & Kortezi, 2008; He, 2015). These principles, meaning benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness, respectively, define ethical standards and guide appropriate social behavior for Chinese people. Their influence extends beyond Confucian texts, permeating official language, interpersonal communication, and artistic and literary expressions for over two millennia. The "Five Constants" significantly shaped the Chinese mind-set, emphasizing both ethical idealism and spiritual values. According to Cooper et al., spiritual values encompass moral and

religious practices, artistic and intellectual pursuits, and social obligations (Cooper et al., 2016). This includes activities like moral instruction, rituals, folk music, and ancestor worship. Traditionally, Chinese children were exposed to Confucian teachings from a young age, with parents, teachers, and peers reinforcing these principles. In contrast to the logic and abstraction prevalent in Greek philosophical works like those of Aristotle, Chinese philosophical writings typically employ a value-laden language style. They often rely on proverbs, witty sayings, and metaphors, making them readily understandable and memorable for a wider audience. While the "Five Constants" ("ren," "yi," "li," "zhi," and "xin") represent enduring values and ethical ideals, Confucianism prescribes specific means to achieve them. This path emphasizes the importance of "cultivating both body and mind" through behaviors like moderation, honesty, thrift, reciprocity, and self-contentment. The goal is to lead a life of spiritual fulfilment and moral uprightness. Confucius believed that material pursuits could corrupt morality, stating, "A gentleman values justice, a petty person values profit" (Analects, 4:16). This perspective led to sayings like "A gentleman is content with poverty," "Poverty brings carefree life," and "Wealth only brings worries." Educated Chinese traditionally held these views, valuing benevolence and righteousness more highly than wealth, as reflected in the saying, "Look at money as trash, but benevolence and righteousness as gold." Consequently, traditional Chinese values often held profits and materialism in disdain. China's economic reforms in the 1980s marked a significant shift in cultural values. Prior to this, traditional ideals emphasized a simple life with few material desires (Cao et al., 2010). However, this began to lose its persuasive power as the government actively promoted a new ethos. The official language adopted terms like "make money and become," "reform and open up," "material civilization," "profit and efficiency," and "fair competition." These expressions, disseminated through state-controlled media, served as a new form of propaganda, signaling a change in China's value orientation. Lu and Chen argues that this shift created an "identity crisis", as the official language continued to claim adherence to an ideology that no longer fully resonated with the public (Lu & Chen, 2011). Traditionally, Confucianism discouraged materialism, and "the pursuit of material gain" was alien to most Chinese. Despite initial uncertainty, the Chinese people quickly adapted to the new language and values promoted by the government. Common people even created their own metaphors to describe this change. Terms like "da kuan" (big money carrier), "xia hai" (going to the sea - referring to career changes), and "te huo" (very fire - referring to making big money) emerged. Greetings like "wishing you and wealth" became commonplace. While the government framed the economic reforms as "unique Chinese socialism," a popular saying captured the public's sense of confusion: "confusing socialism, bashful

capitalism, and deep-rooted feudalism". This linguistic shift demonstrably reshaped Chinese culture. A survey by a Chinese social science committee documented a ten-point change in cultural values since the reforms. These included wider acceptance of wealth, increased preparedness for a market economy, growing appreciation for competition, and a shift towards business-oriented careers. The ideological fervor was replaced by a "frantic pursuit of materialism" (Shi & Reynolds, 2017). China's pursuit of material progress mirrored historical periods like the Industrial Revolution in Europe and the Gold Rush in the United States. However, this "gold rush" was disguised by Deng Xiaoping's slogan of "building socialism with Chinese characteristics." Ironically, while maintaining political continuity with Mao Zedong, this slogan itself signaled a clear departure from the previous era (Chen, 2019; Wu, 2015). Discourse analysis complemented the textual analysis by examining how language itself shaped and reflected these cultural values. We focused on three key areas: ethical idealism, family hierarchy, and the kinship system. Ethical idealism was often conveyed through moral vocabulary and Confucian sayings. The Analects, for instance, used terms like "仁义道德" (ren yi dao de) to emphasize the importance of benevolence and righteousness. Family hierarchy was reinforced through specific kinship terms and respectful language. The use of titles like "父亲" (fùqīn - father) and verbs like "遵从" (zūncóng - to obey) underscored the authority of elders and the obligation of obedience within families. Finally, the kinship system was reflected by the use of distinct terms for paternal and maternal relatives, as well as verbs highlighting reciprocal obligations within the family network. Hierarchical relationships are evident in the concept of the "Three Cardinal Guides," which dictate order within families and the state: "children obey their fathers," "ministers obey their rulers," and "wives obey their husbands." This analysis focuses on how language reflects these hierarchical dynamics within families, specifically examining husband-wife and parent-child relationships (Lu & Chen, 2011). Proverbs like "Follow the man you marry, be he a fool or a crook" and "The husband sings, the wife accompanies" illustrate the traditional power dynamic between husband and wife. The wife's role is typically subordinate to her husband. Ideally, her primary duty is to bear children and "extend the generations." Notably, the language used in marriage reflects this hierarchy. A man is said to "marry" a woman, while a woman is described as "being married to" a man. After marriage, the husband designates his wife as the "inside person," while she refers to him as the "outside man," further reinforcing the division of spheres. The subordinate status of women in traditional Chinese society is further reflected in a range of derogatory terms associated with femininity (Lee, 2015). These terms, often constructed with the character "nu" (woman), include "wicked," "slave," "ignorant," "prostitute," "jealous," "hindering," "adulterous," "greedy," "flattering,"

"detestable," and "envious." This vocabulary reinforces negative stereotypes about Chinese women. China's collectivistic family structure emphasizes prioritizing family harmony over individual needs (Zhang et al., 2014). Concepts like "individualism" and "privacy" are less prominent in traditional Chinese family dynamics. Historically, Chinese parents held significant authority, often dictating their children's futures. Communication flowed primarily from parents to children, with children expected to be seen and not heard ("have ears but no mouth"). Interrupting adults often resulted in punishment. The concept of "filial piety" demands unconditional respect and sacrifice from children towards their parents. Proverbs like "Filial piety is the chief of the hundred virtues" and "Parents are always right" illustrate this absolute deference. Disrespecting one's parents was considered a "rebellion against sacred custom". China's economic reforms ushered in a significant shift towards gender equality within families. Mao Zedong's dictum, "Women can hold half the sky," sparked a change in traditional values. Government slogans like "Men and women are equal" actively promoted this transformation. Consequently, the wife's role transcended childbearing and domestic duties. Women entered the workforce in large numbers, even owning a third of private businesses according to a 1994 Press Freedom Guardian report. The power dynamic within families also evolved, with some husbands even becoming financially dependent on their wives. Divorce is no longer taboo, and women are encouraged to be independent. This societal shift is reflected in the emergence of "model husbands" and women's active participation in public life. China's economic reforms also impacted parent-child relationships. Mao Zedong's emphasis on class struggle strained family bonds, forcing children to potentially denounce their parents. However, the post-Mao era witnessed a rise in individualism, with young people advocating for autonomy in marriage and career choices. Parents, while still offering guidance, assumed a more consultative role. Zhang suggests a shift towards democratic parenting styles (Zhang, 2015). The one-child policy further reshaped family dynamics. The term "xiao zi" (filial son), traditionally signifying a son's obedience, now ironically implies a father's obedience to his "little emperor" child. This linguistic shift reflects a broader societal move away from hierarchical structures and towards greater equality within families. China's social landscape is experiencing a shift from kinship-based connections to "guanxi," a concept emphasizing social networks (Zhang et al., 2017; Zhang, 2021). Traditional kinship terms remain important for familial relationships, but the one-child policy may threaten the use of specific terms designating broader family members. "Guanxi," in contrast, focuses on social connections built through reciprocity and exchange. During Mao's era, "comrade guanxi" signified a revolutionary bond. However, economic reforms have replaced this with "money guanxi," where financial

ties hold greater weight. This shift is further reflected in the changing meaning of "tongzhi," which has evolved from signifying a revolutionary comrade to representing a homosexual relationship. Kinship networks traditionally represent hierarchical structures within families. In contrast, "guanxi" emphasizes a horizontal network of social connections. "Guanxi" often holds greater importance than kinship due to its instrumental and utilitarian value. Unlike kinship ties, which are pre-existing, "guanxi" requires cultivation. People actively "build" ("gao guanxi"), "leverage" ("la guanxi"), and "seek out" ("zhao guanxi") these connections. Potential sources of "guanxi" include former classmates, colleagues, relatives, friends of friends, or even people from the same hometown. Once established, "guanxi" can be strategically "managed" ("manipulate guanxi") to gain advantages. The pervasiveness of "guanxi" across all aspects of life has led to its designation as a dedicated field of study. Individuals' adept at navigating "guanxi" networks are seen as competent communicators, reflecting a value orientation distinct from, but perhaps rooted in, the traditional concept of kinship.

5. CONCLUSION

Our combined textual and discourse analysis revealed a dynamic interplay between language and cultural values across different eras in Chinese history. The Analects, emphasizing ethical vocabulary and Confucian sayings, solidified social order and moral conduct. *Dream of the Red Chamber*, through portrayals of female confinement and material wealth, reflected the Ming Dynasty's social structure. Finally, Lu Xun's short stories, employing social criticism and Western references, captured the disillusionment and modernization of the early 20th century. This analysis demonstrates how language choices within literary works not only reflect, but also reinforce and challenge, prevailing cultural values.

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