

The Integration of Chinese and Western Classical Studies from the Perspective of the Core Socialist Values in the New Era

Yini Guo¹, Xue Yang^{2,*}

¹School of English, Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Tianjin, 300011, China

²College of Management and Economics, Tianjin University, Tianjin, 300072, China

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Abstract: The Chinese culture and Western culture have been increasingly intermingling from the viewpoint of cross-cultural historical process and both cultures have a strong synthesis in their ancient ideas, especially in the idea of "love and benevolence". China's new era is a brave new time in which the unprecedented integration of Chinese and Western culture provides us with a rare opportunity to enter the colorful and radiant Pantheon of human thought, and to rediscover the classics of Chinese and Western thought. Therefore, through the perspective of China's core values of the new era, our mind remains resonant in admiring Confucianism and Western thought. This paper aims to obtain eye-opening discoveries and enlightenment from the observations of scholars, to interpret the Analects of Confucius and the Bible on the platform of human civilization, and to explore the idea of "love" in the classics of Chinese and Western culture guided by the key idea of "Friendship and kindness", so as to promote the integrity of benevolence and fraternity, and to deepen our memory of historical culture.

1. Introduction

The study of the integration of Chinese classical thought and Western classics in China dates back to the Tang Dynasty with the "Nestorian Stele" in Xi'an, which symbolizes the cultural exchange and ideological fusion between traditional Chinese culture and Christian culture. During the Yuan Dynasty, a period marked by religious pluralism, interactions between Confucian and Christian thoughts increased steadily. A particularly influential era was the Ming Dynasty, represented by the "Three Pillars of China" — Xu Guangqi, Li Zhizao, and Yang Tingyun — who embodied Confucian thought and integrated the Confucian concept of "ren ai" (benevolence) with the Christian spirit of "universal love." In the late Ming to early Qing period, Emperor Kangxi advocated the fusion of Confucianism and Christianity, which was also reflected in legislation. During the Republic of China era, Dr. Sun Yatsen promoted the Three Principles of the People and actively combined traditional Chinese thought with Western ideas. Lin Yutang translated Chinese classics into English language and revealed a deep understanding of Christian texts, serving as a cultural bridge between East and West. In *Chinese Characteristics*[1], Arthur H Smith examined

Chinese culture and lifestyle from a missionary’s perspective[1]. Contemporary scholars like Zhuo Xinping, He Guanghu, and Hou Jie have further explored philosophical dialogue, cultural integration, and the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture and its integration with Western Christianity through works such as *Christianity and the Context of Chinese Culture*[2], *Dialogue II: Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity*[3], and *Anthology of the Excellent Chinese Traditional Culture*[4].

2. Research Content and Objectives

In today’s rapidly developing technological era, material wealth is abundant, yet spiritual fulfillment becomes an increasing need for many Chinese people. As a matter of fact, in various social relationships, especially family relationships, an urgent necessity here is to reduce conflicts, alleviate pressures, and to build truly civilized and harmonious large and small. This is particularly true for those suffering depression or family breakdowns, who want the power of life itself. At the root of life’s power is “love.” Whether it is the “Ren Ai” (benevolence) in the Confucian classic *The Analects* or the “love” in the Christian classic *The Bible*, both explore this universal and eternal topic.

This paper aims to explore the integration of Chinese and Western classical studies from the perspective of the core socialist values in the new era. The socialist core values inherit five thousand years of Chinese culture and thought, with traditional moral virtues such as “Ren Ai” (benevolence) and “doing good” inspiring every Chinese. The Confucian classic *The Analects* and the Western classic *The Bible* have served as foundational texts of Eastern and Western cultures for centuries, with their core ideas centered on “love.” This study focuses on selected messages from *The Analects* and poetic discourses from *The Bible* to explore the mutual concept of “Ren Ai” manifested in both.

2.1 Chinese Cultural Classic — The Analects

The Analects is regarded as the supreme Confucian classic, comparable to the Bible in the West. Compiled during the early Warring States period, it has been widely circulated for ages. As a collection of teachings and deeds of Confucius and his disciples, *The Analects* influences generations after generations with its powerful language, rich content, profound connotations, and timeless significance. The beauty of *The Analects* lies not only in its wisdom, but in Confucius’ character, with truthfulness and goodness as the core concepts of “Ren” (benevolence) .

2.2 Western Classic — The Bible

The Bible is the oldest and best-selling book in the Western world, recording some of humanity’s earliest songs of love. Portions written in poetic form convey wisdom and genuine feelings. The Book of Job contemplates suffering in life; the Psalms express the poet’s heartfelt zeal; Proverbs impart wisdom; Ecclesiastes explores purpose of life; and Paul’s poetic epistle on charity, all echoing with the Confucian idea of “love.”

2.3 “Friendliness” in the Core Socialist Values

The core socialist values represent China’s cultural faith, summarizing Chinese cultural characteristics, forming the national value goals, social value orientations, and individual value norms. They form the root of Chinese identity and the lifeblood of national unity, embracing an ethnic connotation. This value system supports China’s inner stability and nurtures its ancient

vitality. “Friendliness” is the twelfth term of the values, beginning with the character “*you*” (friend). In the oracle bone script, “*you*” is depicted as two hands moving in the same direction, a symbol of helping each other and cooperation between each other. Closely related to “*you*” is “*peng*” (companion), which in oracle bone script shows two strings of coins tied together, symbolizing precious and abundant gifts. The root of “friendliness” expresses China’s most fundamental values: helping each other and giving of oneself. The innate friendliness and deep human warmth of the Chinese people are remembered everywhere across the globe, and the radiant beam of “love” shines brilliantly through the core socialist values.

3. The Manifestation of “Ren Ai” in Chinese and Western Classics

3.1 Chinese Cultural Classic — The Analects

The spirit of “Ren Ai” (benevolence) permeates the entire book, The Analects, from beginning to end. A person with a benevolent heart cares for others, understands others, and considers others’ well-being constantly. This spirit has been the profound, tolerant, and noble cultural bloodstream flowing through the Chinese civilization. This kind of “love” manifests on various levels: between teacher and student, father and son, ruler and subject, and friends as well.

In chapter Four of The Analects, it fully discusses the importance of “Ren”. Confucius said, “If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity, what has he to do with the rites of propriety? If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity, what has he to do with music?” This means that without a heart of benevolence, external rituals and music are meaningless. Scholar Qian Mu explained that “Ren” is the genuine affection between people, which rituals and music express externally; however, rituals and music are superficial, while “Ren” is the essential inner core. Confucius emphasized that the foundation of ritual is “Ren,” which remains unchanged despite the transformation of rituals over time.

In chapter Four Confucius said, “The virtuous rest in virtue; the wise desire virtue.” “Only in the good man are emotions of love and hatred right, and to be depended on.” This means that those lacking benevolence cannot maintain self-discipline or endure hardship or pleasure for long. Only the benevolent truly love others and avoid evil. The essence of being a man lies in one’s mind rather than the environment. Whether in poverty or wealth, one cannot find peace without benevolence. Qian Mu likened “Ren” to the kernel of a peach or apricot, which gives life to the fruit; similarly, “Ren” is the kernel of life. Losing the benevolence means losing the foundation of life and a home. The “hate” mentioned is not hatred of the person but hatred of their lack of benevolence, still emphasizing the pivotal role of benevolence.

In chapter Seventeen, Confucius said, “The benevolent love others,” indicating that love is a moral behavior based on benevolence. This love concerns not only personal feelings and needs but others’ welfare and social harmony.

In chapter One Confucius said, “To rule a country of a thousand chariots, there must be reverent attention to business, and sincerity; economy in expenditure, and love for men; and the employment of the people at the proper seasons.” This highlights that governance depends on the ruler’s benevolent heart.

Confucius also said, “A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good.” This stresses that moral character is more important than knowledge acquired.

In chapter Two, Confucius answered a question on filial piety: “The filial piety nowadays means the support of one’s parents. But dogs and horses likewise are able to do something in the way of support;-- without reverence, what is there to distinguish the one support given from the other?”

Filial piety is the spiritual lifeline of the Chinese nation, prerecorded in the Chinese genetic tape. It enriches the connotation of benevolence and provides vital moral guidance and care for humanity.

3.2 Western Classic — The Bible

The essence of The Bible is love. “Love suffers long, and is kind. Love does not envy, love does not parade itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believe all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8; NKJV)

The original Greek word for love here is Agape, meaning divine, unconditional love—principled, selfless, and noble. This love inspires reverence, transforming into dedication and loyalty. Furthermore, The Bible emphasizes power of love to dissolve hatred, bring peace, and foster harmonious communities.

Regarding interpersonal love, The Bible commands loving each other, including loving one’s neighbor, abhorring sin, and treating others kindly. For example:

“Hatred stirs up strife,
But love covers all sins.” (Proverbs 10:12)
“He who covers a transgression seeks love,
But he who repeats a matter separates the best of friends.” (17:9)
“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is,
Than a fattened calf with hatred.” (15:17)
“A friend loves at all times,
And a brother is born for adversity.” (17:17)

3.3 Consensus of Western Sinologists on “Ren Ai” in Chinese Classics

James Legge, a renowned 19th-century British sinologist, alongside French scholar S éraphin Couvreur and German scholar Richard Wilhelm, is regarded as one of the three great translators of Chinese classics into European languages. He devoted his life to the exchange and integration of Chinese and Western cultures. Advocating equality between Western people and Chinese people, he promoted the fusion of Eastern and Western religions. Through translating the Four Books and Five Classics, James Legge introduced the Confucian ideals of propriety, righteousness, and benevolence to the West, providing annotations to help Western readers grasp the essence of “Ren Ai.” Western sinologists have not only translated The Analects, but offered profound cultural, philosophical, and historical interpretations, greatly contributing to the Western understanding of Confucianism and Chinese traditional culture.

Simon Leys, a Belgian sinologist, valued modern interpretations of The Analects. In 1987, his French translation of The Analects was published by the prestigious Gallimard Publishing House, and hailed as a “decisive translation”, causing a sensation in Europe. The famous French sinologist René Etiemble praised it for “making Confucius’s thought immortal.” Simon Leys asserted that no book in history had such a lasting impact on humanity as this single volume, calling it “the only key to unlock the door to China.” His translation philosophy emphasized applying ancient wisdom to the present and adapting Chinese thought for Western use, highlighting the contemporary relevance and value of The Analects. He regarded it as the classic promoting virtues such as righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and benevolence, with moral principles still true to personal and public life of mankind as a whole.

Richard Wilhelm, a German sinologist, is celebrated as a key figure in the history of China-European cultural exchange. His German translation of The Analects remains the authoritative version in the German-speaking world in the 21st century. Having spent over twenty years in China,

he developed a profound connection with Confucius and Confucianism, reflected in his Chinese name, Xi Sheng, and he even identified himself as a Confucian follower. Richard Wilhelm stated, “No one can study China without passing through Confucius; Confucius is the ideal of the vast majority of Chinese people. Without understanding a nation’s ideal, one cannot properly evaluate that nation.” His lifelong sinological work deeply influenced Western understanding of Confucian thought.

4. “Friendliness–Benevolence”: The Integration of Core Values of Eastern and Western Thought

“Friendliness” and “benevolence” embody humanity’s shared mental pursuit and moral ideal. These values possess profound historical roots and cultural heritage within Eastern societies, playing a crucial role in maintaining social stability and promoting interpersonal harmony. Through the promotion and practice of the “friendliness–benevolence” values, the world can gain a better understanding of the essence and aspirations of Eastern culture.

Friendliness also reflects the common value pursuit of human society. From an aesthetic perspective, friendliness is a celebration and praise of humanity’s inherent kindness, advocating mutual understanding, respect, and tolerance among people. On a deeper level, friendliness constitutes an essential part of the world. It represents a positive attitude and thinking that can inspire innate kindness and goodness. Through acts of friendliness, we transmit positive energy, influence others, and ultimately build a better world together.

“Benevolence” is a profound moral sentiment emphasizing care, respect, and tolerance for others, reflecting the interdependence and harmonious coexistence among people. Western culture, though expressed differently, shares the same concepts. For example, the Christian idea of “universal love” stresses selfless love and care for all, resonating closely with the Confucian notion of “Ren Ai” (benevolence).

This commonality offers a foundation for the integration of Eastern and Western cultures around the concept of “benevolence.” In today’s era of accelerating globalization, cultural exchanges and interactions have become increasingly frequent and intimate. This trend encourages greater focus on cultural commonalities and how they complement and enlighten each other. In this process, the “benevolence” ideals in both Chinese and Western cultures can mutually inform and integrate, jointly promoting social harmony and progress. Both cultures advocate social harmony and peaceful coexistence, and their fusion encourages greater attention to social stability, conflict reduction, and the advancement of human society.

Burton Watson, a renowned American sinologist devoted to Eastern cultural studies, made significant contributions to the spreading of Chinese culture in the West. His translation of *The Analects*, published when he was 82 years old, is celebrated for its clarity, accuracy, and philosophical depth in conveying Confucius’ teachings. Watson frequently emphasized the practical and universal value of Confucian thought, noting that *The Analects* is not merely a collection of Chinese ancient philosophy but a guide to life, with moral integrity, personal cultivation. He admired Confucius’ pragmatic moral outlook, which focuses on self-improvement and benefiting others. Watson also highlighted the historical and cultural significance of *The Analects*, pointing out that Confucius’ ideas profoundly influenced Chinese civilization for centuries. Through his translations and commentaries, Watson presented *The Analects* as a living document that continues to offer wisdom and guidance on contemporary moral and philosophical issues, greatly enhancing Western understanding of Confucianism.

The Analects and *The Bible*, as representative classics of Eastern and Western cultures, exhibit their core ideas and cultural influence. French scholar François Noël, author of *Sinensis Imperii Libri*

Classici Sex, stated that on Gu Hongming's desk lay the Bible, Confucian works, and the Quran. Noël compared these texts and deeply reflected on them. Regarding the cultural integration of The Analects and The Bible, Noël believed that Confucius expresses the Eastern ideal of "Ren" with reason and conscience, while Christianity represents the West with compassion and love. They perfectly complement each other.

Shi Hengtang, in his work *When the Analects Meets the Bible*[5]: The Positive Intersection of Chinese Culture and Christianity, builds bridges between Chinese culture and Christianity through the loving heart of the benevolent and the wisdom of the sage. Immersed in the precious ideas of The Analects and the Bible, he offers a unique perspective that illuminates both classics, drawing mutual reference and light. His dialogue spans themes such as filial piety, propriety, benevolence, and wisdom, fostering Eastern-Western cultural exchange.

Overseas scholars tend to delve into the Chinese traditions and their transformations within classic literature and historic events, analyzing the connections and evolution between modernity and tradition. Michael Gow integrates Confucian values with the strategic Chinese Dream, significantly enhancing public identification with the nation's values. Alexander Romanov notes that "China has developed its soft powers, systematized its own values, intensified propaganda efforts, which becomes the nation's main ideological work." [6]

Comparative research of overseas and domestic scholars shows that overseas scholars generally avoid superficial textual interpretations of the core values, instead, they focus on analyzing and evaluating them in the context of China's historical culture and contemporary society. An academic consensus among overseas scholars is that understanding today's China requires profound knowledge of its unique civilization, traditional culture, and core values. Professor Liu Shulin of Tsinghua University emphasizes the importance of enabling core values to gain vitality with Chinese characteristics, aspiring overseas scholars' awareness and understanding of Confucian traditional culture [7].

5. The Core Values of the New Era: Continuous Transcendence and Integration through Deepening Opening policy

China's new era values profoundly embody the Confucian ideal of "establishing the soul for Heaven and Earth, setting the destiny for the people, inheriting the teachings of the sage, and opening peace for all generations." The transcendence of classical Chinese thought is reflected in its progressive development. Originating from the ancient Yellow River and flourishing along the Silk Road—a term first appearing in 1877 by German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in his book *China*—the external dissemination of Chinese civilization has always been significant.

It has been pointed out: "Since ancient times, the Chinese nation has engaged with foreign peoples and cultures with the broad-mindedness of 'Great Unity under Heaven' and 'Harmony among Nations,' confident and magnanimous." Through long-term evolution, Chinese civilization has nourished itself through exchanges with other civilizations and contributed importantly to the progress of mankind. The Silk Road, beyond a trade route, served as a cultural bridge through which Chinese silk, tea, and porcelain reached the West, while Western glass, spices, and jewels entered China. This material and cultural exchange forged economic prosperity and interdependence among countries along the route.

Chinese classical thought continuously absorbs beneficial foreign elements and integrates them with indigenous culture, forming a distinctive cultural system. This capacity for self-renewal and development enables classical thought to maintain vitality and influence under new historical conditions. The integration of Chinese and Western cultures has revitalized the Silk Road. As exchanges deepen, cultural fusion occurs in art, religion, and philosophy. Confucianism and Taoism

spread westward, interacting with Western philosophy. This cultural fusion enriches the cultural connotations and provides a broader, deeper foundation for the development of the Silk Road, which is based on mutual cultural understanding and respect among peoples of different backgrounds along the route, promoting economic and cultural exchanges.

The integration of Chinese and Western cultures also propelled the Silk Road's extension and expansion. With deeper and broader cultural exchanges, trade routes expanded to connect more countries and regions, enhancing economic ties and providing a wider platform for East-West cultural interaction.

President Nixon recognized the tremendous power of classical Chinese thought in the 21st century and acknowledged that the historical secret to the Chinese nation's victories remains the source of modern China's strength. He respected Chinese classical thought and revealed the importance of China's cultural soft power. A nation's culture is not only its unique identity, but an indispensable element for national cohesion and spiritual strength.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's book *On China* mentions the word "history" 234 times and cites Confucian thought and *The Art of War* 128 times. Chinese classical thought serves as his lens for observing contemporary China. He discusses Confucius' concepts of justice, harmony, "Dao," and "Ren." Kissinger quotes Confucius', "Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire", emphasizing respect and empathy as core values. He argues that China's diplomatic success hinges on valuing harmony and respect, the key elements of China's international narrative.

In the late 1980s, several Nobel Prize winners in France asserted that humanity in the 21st century must trace its roots and draw wisdom from Confucius. British thinker Arnold Toynbee stated: "Confucian thought is the world's best hope." Confucius' Ren does not only establish moral self-cultivation and interpersonal ethics, expressing human values and ideals and promoting harmony between man and nature, but elevates personal and national character.

The ancient generations who preserved classical studies have passed them on to our generation. The Belt and Road Initiative draws inspiration from the Silk Road historical symbolism, upholding the banner of peaceful development and actively fostering economic cooperation with partners. This initiative emphasizes openness, inclusiveness, communication, and mutual benefit, promoting broader cooperation and exchange among countries along the route. In this process, the integration of Chinese and foreign cultures has become more proactive and dynamic. For example, China's traditional culture and foreign culture have collided and merged more frequently in the Belt and Road countries, promoting cultural diversity and innovation.

The impact of Chinese-Western cultural integration on the Belt and Road development is multifaceted, including enhancing mutual understanding and trust, improving global governance, promoting economic prosperity, and advancing human civilization. Going forward, we should continue to strengthen cultural exchange and cooperation, fostering deeper integration and development of Chinese and Western cultures, injecting new vitality and momentum into Belt and Road construction. The spirit of "benevolence" in Chinese and Western classics positively influences the core socialist values in the new era's high-quality development stage, providing important cultural productivity resources and strong historical and moral support for building a harmonious society.

6. Conclusion

It is stated: "China's excellent traditional culture is the root of the Chinese nation. Its ideas, spirit, and moral norms do not only form the core of Chinese thought, but hold important value for solving problems of humanity. We must extract and showcase the cultural essence with contemporary and

global significance from this excellent tradition.” The People’s Daily Commentary Department categorizes and interprets 135 historical allusions cited by Chinese president, indicating that The Analects is the most frequently quoted Confucian classic in his speeches. Dr. Taylor of UNESCO remarked: “A prosperous and successful society today largely rests on the values established and expounded by Confucius. These values transcend borders and eras; they belong to China and the world; to the past and illuminate the present and future.” The core values of the new era form the foundation of reform, the source of confidence and courage; they provide joy in sorrow, inspire hope in despair; illuminate light in darkness, shower wisdom in ignorance, enlighten clarity in confusion, and empower direction in uncertainty. The socialist core values embody metaphysical moral standards that inspire reverence among Chinese people, while “friendliness” reflects the tangible, everyday experience of ordinary people, transforming lofty ideals into deep-seated happiness. In this sense, the new era’s values bring the Chinese Dream into every aspect of contemporary life, making it a widely practicable way of life. This value system, which genuinely contributes to human happiness, is deeply rooted in the hearts of friendly Chinese people, becoming a vital part of human development and uplifting the grand achievements of China’s new era with brilliant vitality.

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