

Relationship between Cultural Philosophy and Work Values in Chinese Employees

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Abstract: In China, culture is considered to be an important aspect of the personal and professional life of the people. As a result, different cultural philosophies are also incorporated in Chinese organizations which impact their both organizational and work values. However, not much focus has been given to cultural philosophies in this regard in the past literature, therefore, the main aim of this study is to determine the relationship between cultural philosophy. For this purpose, qualitative research was considered, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Chinese employees. The collected edited transcription is then codified via NVivo and thematic analysis was performed. The results obtained from the study showed that different cultural philosophies such as Guanxi and Confucianism are mainly embedded in Chinese organizations, emphasizing harmony, collectivism, teamwork, and effective leadership strategies. However, the concept of work-life balance is still new in Chinese organizations; while work ethics are strong and effective in Chinese organizations and they also promote morality and social responsibilities. Thus, it has been recommended that Chinese organizations should align organizational values with work values via traditional and cultural philosophies to ensure an effective working environment for the employees.

Keywords: Cultural Philosophy; Work Values; Organizational Values; Chinese Employees; Harmony; Collectivism

1. INTRODUCTION

With more Chinese managers working abroad and collaborating with local employees, China's impact on the world has increased during the last several decades. China is anticipated to overtake the United States as the top cross-border investor by 2020, accordingly with the Financial Times (Anderlini, 2015). There may be issues as people with different work styles, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds interact (Choo et al., 2009). A growing number of Chinese managers are finding employment in developed nations as a result of the expanding economic relations between China and Western countries (Leung, 2014). Because Chinese managers rely on a distinctive cultural and philosophical background that extends back thousands of years, Chinese managerial philosophy can be challenging for foreign businesspeople to understand (Weiss & Bloom, 1990). While cultural characteristics often remain constant over time, sociological,

political, and economic developments can result in cultural changes, raising questions about the relevance of long-standing customs (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001; Lin, 2011). Only a small number of countries in the past century have seen societal changes similar to those that have occurred in China since the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 in terms of both scope and quantity.

The history, culture, traditions, and present development of the nation all add to its uniqueness (Hsu, 1974; Kulich & Zhang, 2010). Chinese people's attitudes and behaviors are significantly influenced by their core ideas or values. These principles are further formed by Chinese philosophies, the most prevalent of which being Confucianism, which has an impact on how Chinese people live and view the world (Yang, 2016). Culture has come to be understood as being crucial in differentiating work values and their significance across time.

The focus placed on unique cultural values affects which work objectives are promoted and rewarded, hence there isn't one work goal that can be universally beneficial in all cultures. The value ascribed to money, status, or vacation time varies from country to country, and the kinds of rewards people look for from their jobs, as well as the financial and non-financial incentives they want, also range significantly among cultures (Jaw et al., 2007). In addition, previous value research has shown that there are cultural differences between Chinese and Western samples, notably in regards to Confucian dynamism and avoidance of uncertainty (Hofstede, 1980, 1993). The studies found that Chinese participants valued Confucian dynamism more highly, but no feature of avoiding ambiguity was apparent. Given China's expanding importance on the world stage, the many difficulties Western companies have had navigating Chinese business philosophy have been well-documented (Ralston et al., 1995; Tung, 1981).

Although hierarchy is important, various cultures have distinct dynamics between leaders and followers because workplaces have different types of friction or conflict. The Confucian tradition, a central tenet of Chinese culture, is the source of the Chinese leadership style, which places a high priority on hierarchy. However, the contemporary Chinese leadership has also been impacted by other classical Chinese philosophies including Taoism, Legalism, and Buddhism (Cheung & Chan, 2005; Jenco, 2008). There is a lack of studies about the work values of employees and Chinese philosophies. It is an emergent need to know how these philosophies impact the work values of employees in China, therefore, this study highlights the relationship between the philosophies and work values. Complex ideologies have a profound impact on Chinese managers'

leadership styles, which affect both their operations within China and outside. Confucianism and Taoism are the two main cultural influences that define the Chinese business attitude (Fang, 2012), who developed a framework for Chinese business culture. The Taoist idea of yin-yang equilibrium is noteworthy because it can be interpreted as a paradox that aims to combine two opposing elements (like cultural differences) in a thorough and dynamic balance that can be partially in conflict and partially complementary, reflecting a duality. This idea is particularly applicable in intercultural studies.

This shows that different cultures work together as well as engage in conflict (Li, 2016). Even though Confucianism continues to have a considerable impact on Chinese culture, it's crucial to take into account China's enormous cultural changes while examining work ethic. People's attempts to adjust to the larger sociological, political, and economic context can cause social alterations that result in changes in work-related values and attitudes (Li et al., 2020). The study aims to understand how the cultural philosophy of Chinese employees impacts their work values. The objectives of the study include, to explore cultural philosophies prevalent in Chinese organizations. Secondly, to explore the association between personal and professional values of Chinese employees. Lastly, to explore the linkage between organizational values and work values of Chinese employees. The target audience for this study will be the employees of Chinese organizations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Background

In the context of the whole of human history Chinese philosophies and Chinese civilization has always been remarked as the most up-to-date civilization based on its cultural philosophies. Based on the unique geographical environment and historical development Chinese philosophies are thought to be highly developed and followed philosophies throughout the world due to their unique and revitalizing traditions, ethics, and customs (Zhao & Tao, 2019).

The Confucianism cultural strategy is supported by the theory named “*neo-Confucianism*” thus elaborated by Confucian scholars (An et al., 2021). The *neo-Confucianism* theory is based on a set of ontologies for the Confucianism philosophy named “*Li-Qi Theory*” according to which Li is used to demonstrate the basic principles of ethics and Qi is used to

demonstrate the material thus the universe is composed of. According to Confucian scholars Li is thought to be the first nature of the universe and Qi is thought to be the second nature of the universe, collectively they both form the basis for the neo-Confucianism strategy and the Confucianism philosophy has a significant influence on the working values of employees working within an organization.

The Taoism cultural philosophy proposed by China is supported by the “*Yin and Yang theory*” which refers to the two opposing principles of the universe i.e. the feminine and masculine negative and positive factors of nature and is used to fulfill the desire of human beings for inner peace by enhancing the rationality and utilitarianism in the modern world (Tu, 2019). Moreover, the Taoism cultural philosophy thus demonstrated by the Chinese plays a significant role in affecting the work values of various organizations.

2.2 Cultural Philosophies Prevalent in Chinese Organizations

The most famous and crucial cultural philosophies that have been used by the Chinese industries to enhance the work values of their employees so that they can work with great passion are Taoism and Confucianism. However, the applicability of these two cultural philosophies is still to be understood and researched by various philosophers and researchers.

In this modern era, the global existence of China has continued to expand and numerous numbers of Chinese managers are working across the world (Lin et al., 2018). It is a fact that people working at a similar place and from different civilizations, possessing different structural values, working styles, and cultural values play a key role in the formulation of new challenges for the working environment. The Chinese Cultural philosophies are thus restricted to various philosophies such as Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and many more cultural philosophies (Chen et al., 2014) and the most common cultural philosophies thus implanted by the Chinese organizations are Taoism and Confucianism, the applicability of which has been focused by the researcher.

Taoism originated in China over eighteen hundred years ago (Xie et al., 2022). Moreover, it has also been interpreted that there are almost ninety million Taoism believers in the world. The applications of Taoism have been significant and most preferred by Chinese organizations as compared to the Confucianism cultural philosophy because Taoism enhances the capability of the company to achieve its goals and also provides a competitive approach and advantage as well which ultimately leads to stable growth of the organization (Luo & Zheng, 2016). In the context of

the Yin-Yang principle, Taoism helps provide the organization with a detailed analysis regarding the paradox management of various organizations, as obvious from the notion of Taoism under the Yin-Yang principle thus evidenced in the theoretical background (Tu, 2019).

Chinese businesses are concerned about their relational aspect while keeping in the context of interpersonal interactions (Yuan et al., 2023). To maintain the relational aspect within Chinese organizations they prefer to incorporate the Confucianism cultural philosophy. The reason for implanting the Confucianism cultural philosophy within various organizations is that this type of cultural philosophy is quite helpful for Chinese organizations to maintain the normative culture between interpersonal and inter-organizational relations by enhancing trust and commitment as well (Wang & Hackett, 2016). In addition, Confucianism's cultural philosophy provides the organization's various guiding principles which are responsible for guidance, filtration, and the governance of social values as well as behavioral patterns. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the importance of Chinese Cultural philosophies i.e. Taoism and Confucianism in various Chinese organizations.

2.3 Impact of Cultural Philosophies on the work values of Employees

When we focus on the work values of the employees working within a particular organization it is necessary to analyze the impact of the cultural philosophies on their work values. The key cultural philosophies thus analyzed should be Confucianism and Taoism cultural philosophies thus originated from China by the Confucian and Taoist scholars in the context of various theories as a shred of evidence to signify the impact of both of these cultural philosophies over the working values of employees within an organization. According to research (Xing & Starik, 2017), the impact of Confucianism and Taoism has been elaborated where the Confucianism cultural philosophy refers to the core work values of the employees where the employees are admired, respected, and appreciated by the organization and this is the way to promote a significant and sustainable work environment for the employees to accomplish the outcomes and goals of the organization. Moreover, the Confucianism cultural philosophy has also a deep effect on the leadership strategies of the organization, and mostly the transformational leaders prefer to adopt the Confucianism cultural philosophy because it not only provides them with respect regarding ethical values but also enhances the work values of the employees working under them by appreciating the employees to enhance their working capability. Therefore, it can be quoted that Confucianism's philosophy significantly

impacts the work values of employees. In a recent study (Subramanian et al., 2019) it has been illustrated that Taoism philosophy is capable of providing cultural and philosophical stability in the work values of the employees working within an organization because it deals with the individual interaction of the employees. Moreover, the Taoism philosophy refers to the natural ways thus followed by the nature and promotes the competitiveness of the employees which ultimately enhances the work values of the employees working within an organization where the Taoist leaders enable their employees to work while helping each other and this promotes the green working capabilities of the employees. Therefore, it can be illustrated that Taoism plays a significant role in enhancing the work values of the organizational employees.

3. METHODS

3.1 Context of the study

This study explores the association between Chinese cultural philosophy and work values in Chinese employees. This study examines different cultural philosophies in China, such as Taoism and Confucianism; these philosophies influence the daily practices of Chinese individuals. This section of the paper provides detail of the research methodology used in the study, which includes the adopted philosophical approach methods for data collection and data analysis in detail.

3.2 Research Method

This study has adopted a qualitative research method. This includes social phenomena and emphasises individuals' beliefs and behaviours (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). This research approach is inductive, and it utilises the interpretivism research philosophy (Pope & Mays, 2020). In the qualitative research method, the data is usually collected in a non-numerical form, such as pictorial images, texts, pictures, words, videos, audio etc. The analysis approach usually used for analysing the collected data is narrative analysis, content analysis, thematic analysis and other techniques (Kyngäs, 2020a; Robinson, 2022).

3.3 Research Philosophy

As stated by Adakawa and Garba (2020), "A research philosophy is a belief about how the data about a phenomenon should be gathered, analysed and used". The present study has used the interpretivism

philosophy of research, which states that reality is subjective and, therefore, depends upon an individual's personal beliefs, ideas and experiences. This philosophy states that reality is socially constructed and varies from individual to individual (Singh, 2019). Several past researchers have suggested using this philosophy while doing research of qualitative nature because this approach heavily relies on observation and questioning to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

3.4 Research Approach

There are two types of research approaches that are widely used, including “the inductive research approach and the deductive research approach” (Benitez-Correa et al., 2019). In the present study, the researcher has utilised an inductive research approach. In the view of Casula et al. (2021), inductive research approach allows the researcher to start an investigation with some specific phenomenon and then move the observations and findings of the study towards a general phenomenon. The inductive research approach is widely used in studies of qualitative nature (Kynge, 2020b). The researcher has adopted this technique because it is the most suitable one to collect the data from the target audience and test the tentative statements developed from the research objectives.

3.5 Research Strategy

In the present study, the researcher has adopted a semi-structured interview research strategy. According to Rashid et al. (2019), while research is conducted in the social sciences, the interview research strategy is widely accepted. The researcher has adopted this strategy because of its alliance with the research objectives and aim of the study. Therefore, it is the most appropriate one to collect the data.

3.6 Target Population and Sampling

The target population of the current study is the employees working in different Chinese organizations. The study has utilized the non-probability sampling technique. The researcher used convenience sampling to collect the data only from those respondents who were voluntarily ready to participate in the study. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews face to face after respondents. There was a total of 8 participants in the study.

3.7 Analysis

For the analysis of data, the researcher first recorded the description of the interviews. The interview lasted for half an hour to 50 minutes for each respondent it was then analysed using N-Vivo software. With the help of the software, there is searcher codified the collected transcripts of the interviews and then conducted the thematic analysis to analyse if there exist similar themes and patterns in the gathered data.

4. RESULTS

The edited version of the interview transcription was collected and was presented to the respondents to ensure the integrity of the collected, later on, after effective verification, the collected data was analyzed using NVivo software, and important themes and sub-themes (figure 1) were formulated for this study which is given as follows:

Theme I: Cultural Philosophies in Chinese Organizations

Theme Ia: Guanxi and Confucianism

Theme Ib: Work Ethic

Theme II: Relationship between Personal and Professional Values of Chinese Employees

Theme IIa: Harmony and Collectivism

Theme IIb: Work-life Balance

Theme III: Association between Organizational Values and Work Values of Chinese Employees

Theme IIIa: Leadership Strategies

Theme IIIb: Job Satisfaction

Theme IV: Recommendations to Improve Relationship between Cultural Philosophy and Work Values in Chinese Employees

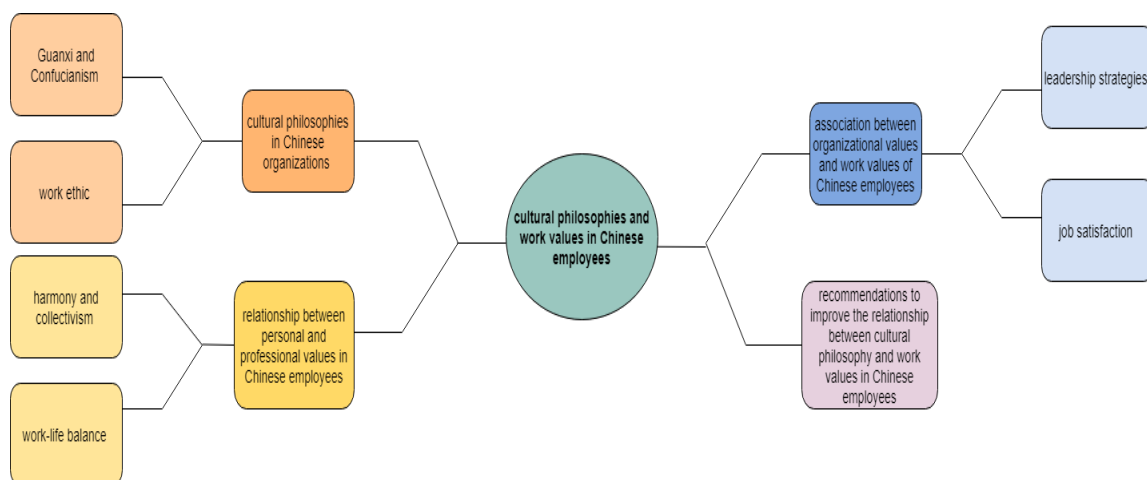


Figure 1. Min map of Thematic analysis

4.1 Theme I: Cultural Philosophies in Chinese Organizations

Cultural philosophies are considered to be an important part of Chinese organizations as they help in ensuring the social order and hierarchy of the organization. In Chinese organizations, employees mostly prioritize their work over their families due to stringent work ethics and the incorporation of cultural philosophies which mainly focus on respect for authority. When asked about the prevalence of cultural philosophies in Chinese organizations, one of the respondents stated:

“Well... In China, we value our cultural beliefs and incorporate them in both our personal and professional life... so, there is no doubt that cultural philosophies such as Guanxi and Confucianism are implemented in different Chinese organizations.”

4.2 Theme Ia: Guanxi and Confucianism

According to the respondents, Guanxi is commonly applied in Chinese organizations as they believe in working together as a team, which could be effective in obtaining the required outcomes. Moreover, other respondents also highlighted the significance of Confucianism in Chinese organizations as one of them said:

“Confucianism emphasizes the significance of ethical behavior, social harmony, and promotion of personal virtues such as sincerity, compassion, and wisdom.”

4.3 Theme Ib: Work Ethic

The respondents stated work ethic is an important part of cultural philosophy in Chinese organizations. The work ethic is important in fulfilling the social responsibilities of the organizations and it also reflects the practices and values of Chinese organizations. In this regard, one of the respondents stated:

“Work ethic in Chinese organizations, emphasizes hard work and diligence.”

4.4 Theme II: Relationship between Personal and Professional Values of Chinese Employees

The professional and personal values of Chinese employees are mostly intertwined as personal values often impact the professional decisions and behaviors of the employees. In this regard, one of the respondents said:

“In Chinese organizations, most of the employees consider their professional success as their personal integrity reflection.... I am the

perfect example.”

4.5 Theme IIa: Harmony and Collectivism

According to the respondents, the cultural philosophies in Chinese organizations are effective in promoting harmony and collectivism.

They were of the view that employees who develop harmonious relationships with their colleagues and other associated people tend to perform better in a team, leading to effective outcomes.

One of the respondents emphasized the promotion of collectivism and harmony in Chinese organizations as he stated:

“I am an old school and still believe in the saying.... United we stand, divided we fall.”

4.6 Theme IIb: Work-life Balance

In Chinese culture, hard work is mainly promoted and not much focus has been given to the work-life balance in the context of Chinese organizations. However, currently, the concept of work-life balance is being incorporated in Chinese organizations, as one of the respondents stated:

“To be honest, the concept of work-life balance is quite new for us but we are trying to get our heads around it.”

4.7 Theme III: Association between Organizational Values and Work Values of Chinese Employees

The association between organizational values and work values in Chinese organizations is largely influenced by their cultural and traditional values, as one of the respondents stated:

“We usually prioritize the organizational values which are aligned with our work values, as they are rooted in the associated cultural philosophies.”

4.8 Theme IIIa: Leadership Strategies

In Chinese organizations, the integration of an effective hierarchical structure is considered to be important.

In this regard, many respondents have emphasized the development of an effective leadership strategy to obtain effective outcomes. One of the respondents stated:

“The cultural philosophies in Chinese organizations emphasize clear leadership strategies to ensure effective decision-making processes.”

4.9 Theme IIIb: Job Satisfaction

The respondents were of the view that an effective association between organizational values and work values is crucial to ensure the job satisfaction of the employees in Chinese organizations. They were of the view that when teamwork and collaboration are promoted in an organization, it helps in promoting internal and external support for the employees, leading to job satisfaction, which encourages them to perform their best. In this regard, one of the respondents stated:

“In my opinion, the lack of association between the organizational values and the work values might result in lack of employee engagement, resulting in job dissatisfaction.”

4.9.1 Theme IV: Recommendations to Improve Relationship between Cultural Philosophy and Work Values in Chinese Employees

Different suggestions were given by the respondents to improve the relationship between cultural philosophy and work values in Chinese employees, as one of them highlighted the incorporation of work-life balance in this regard while others were determined to implement a strong and effective organizational culture in the organizations. In this regard, one of the respondents stated:

“In my opinion, the organizational values should be aligned with the work values of the employees to develop an effective and productive working environment.”

Figures 2 and 3 present the tree map and project map for the current thematic analysis, highlighting the important themes and sub-themes.

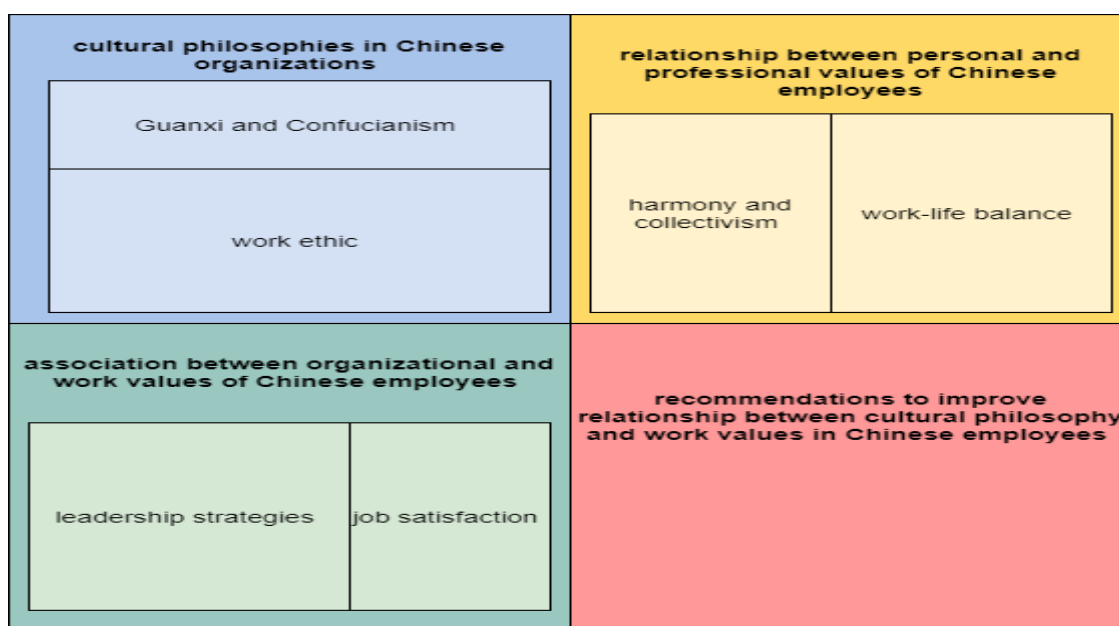


Figure 2: Tree map of Thematic analysis

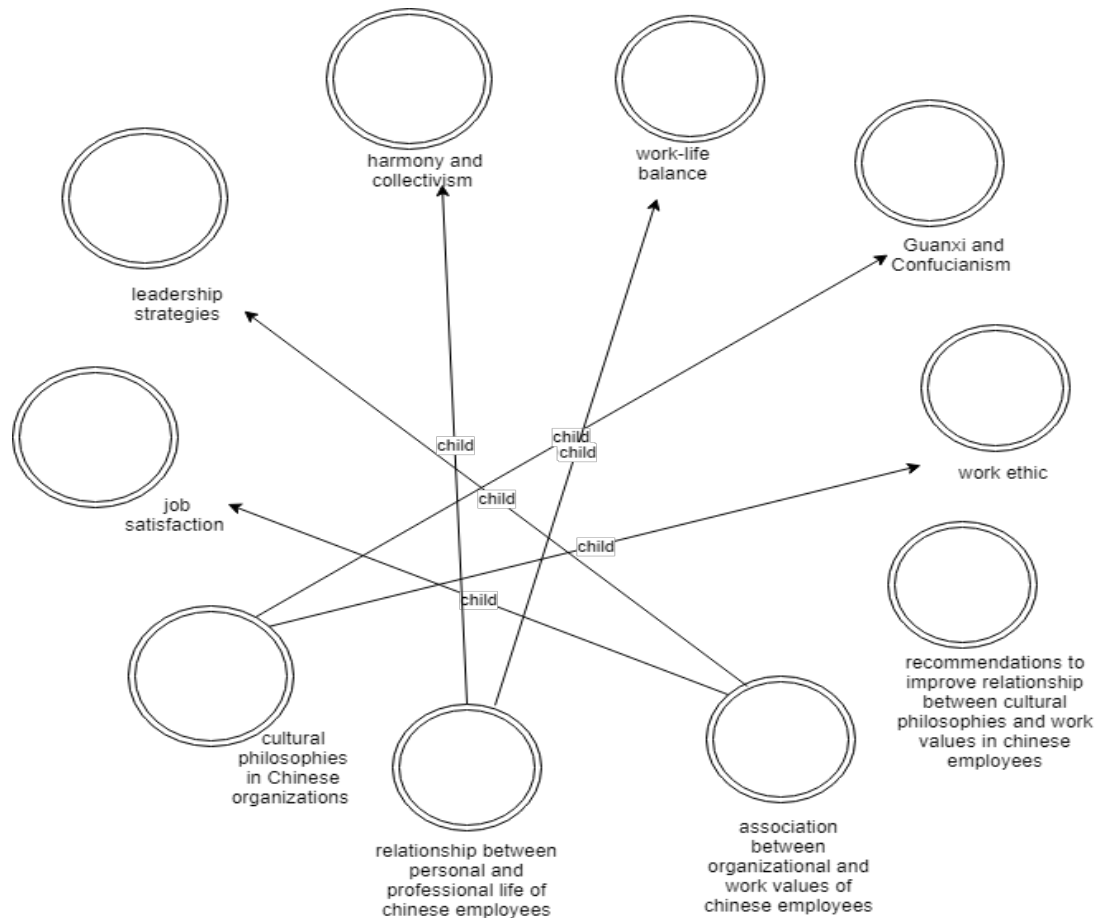


Figure 3. Project map of thematic analysis

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study was conducted to analyze the relationship between cultural philosophies and work values among employees in China. For the accomplishment of research objectives, the researcher approached a “qualitative-designed methodology” and conducted interviews to attain beneficial insights. Results of the thematic analysis indicated that cultural philosophies hold greater significance in China as they assist in the assurance of the hierarchical and social pattern of their organizations. China is renowned as a potential work-oriented country. Cultural beliefs are found to be present as Chinese value the beliefs to a greater extent in both their professional and personal lives. Results exhibited that the mostly applied cultural philosophies in China are “Confucianism and Guanxi”. Both these philosophies are indicated differently in terms of their related meanings and aspects. Apart from being a workaholic, the Chinese prefer to work in teams due to their collaborative and cooperative working nature (Krosinsky et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020). Results also highlighted that

Confucianism is equally significant and believed as a significant cultural philosophy among Chinese. From the results, it can be estimated that the Chinese are successful due to their work devotion and work ethics prioritization.

The thematic analysis also demonstrates the association between the personal and professional values of employees in China. Results indicated that in China, the cultural philosophies are effective for the promotion of collectivism and harmony. From this perspective, teamwork and employee collaboration can be understood. Because Chinese consider harmonious and positive work relationships as an important factor for performing better, particularly when they work as a team. An important factor that is important to discuss is the concept of “work-life balance” (Cooke & Jing, 2009; Yang, 2012). Chinese are so devoted to their jobs and work lives that there is no focus on work-life balance in Chinese corporate culture (Huang et al., 2022). Although meeting organizational aims and objectives is essential and must be a top priority for any employee but the element of the work-life balance must go hand in hand. Because excessive focus on work can be harmful to the employees’ health. Therefore, it would be an effective suggestion for Chinese firms to include strategies for work life balance in their companies.

As far as the result of the association between organizational values and work values of Chinese employees is considered, the traditional and cultural values of China play a major role in this regard. Therefore the majority of the respondents highlighted the need and importance of developing effective leadership strategies. In this regard, effective outcomes can be achieved which is the ultimate goal of most businesses. Furthermore, job satisfaction was also considered important to retain employees. A better linkage between the values of the organization and work ethics is important to ensure job satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2022). As mentioned above, teamwork helps in motivating employees both internally and externally resulting in adequate job satisfaction. And it is a renowned fact that when job satisfaction prevails, employees are encouraged to perform better and bring the best out of themselves.

5.1. Conclusion

Culture is an identity of any nation as it plays a significant role in shaping the corporate sector’s principles and codes of conduct.

In the present research, the researcher is also focused on exploring the association between work values and cultural philosophies among employees in China. The nature of this topic required the attainment of

direct input from employees through conducting in-person interviews so that their attitudes, perspectives, and knowledge regarding work values and cultural philosophies can be assessed adequately. For this purpose, face to face semi-structured interviews with eight employees of Chinese organizations were conducted.

Results indicated that Chinese corporations consider teamwork, collaboration, and harmony as leading work ethics. The most prevalent cultural philosophies in China include Confucianism and Guanxi. Work-life balance is low in Chinese corporations as they are immensely workaholics and huge attention to this area are required.

5.2. Research Implications

The present study contributes prominently to the theoretical body of knowledge regarding Chinese work ethics and the corporate cultural environment. As culture is an essential element for any nation, the present study adds to the growing body of literature and attempts to highlight the importance of cultural ethics and philosophies in detail.

The practical importance of the study is also significant. As one common aspect highlighted through the interviews is that the Chinese mainly neglect work-life balance and are excessively workaholics. So corporate sector of China and particularly their policymakers of the HR department can gain insights from the study by incorporating effective strategies to create work-life balance for their employees. The analysis section also contains recommendations from interviewees to improve the relationship between cultural philosophies and work values in China which is itself an important practical assistance for Chinese organizations.

5.3. Limitations and future research indications

The present study has numerous shortcomings, the most important of which is the alteration of methodological choice. The organizational culture can also be tested empirically by researchers in a different context (other than China). Due to time constraints, the researcher only conducted interviews with a limited number of employees, so the sample size can be enhanced in the future. Future researchers can also specify and narrow down the context of research such as service, agricultural, technology, and manufacturing sector to assess cultural philosophy and work ethics in China.

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