



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHINESE CONFUCIANISM AND MODERN JAPANESE LANGUAGE: TAKING *I AM A CAT* AS AN EXAMPLE



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Abstract: Confucian thought provides guidance on social structure and political governance. It was introduced to Japan as early as the fourth century AD (Anno Domini) and has been deeply imprinted in Japan's history and culture for thousands of years. This article takes *I am a cat* as a specific example to analyze the specific Confucian ideas reflected in Japanese relational language. *I am a cat* is a classic work by the famous modern Japanese satirist Soseki Natsume. From the specific reflection of *I am a cat*, Japanese relational language includes Confucian concepts of superiority and inferiority, loyalty and filial piety, harmony and gratitude, as well as the concepts of propriety, benevolence and righteousness. It also reflects that Confucian philosophy has penetrated into Japanese related language. In such research, Japanese learners can gain a more intuitive understanding of the impact of Confucianism on modern Japanese relational language to improve the learning effectiveness. It also helps to develop the understanding of the influence of Confucian culture on Japan.


Keywords: Chinese Confucianism. Modern Japanese. Superiority and Inferiority. Loyalty. Filial Piety.

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Resumo: O pensamento confucionista fornece orientação sobre a estrutura social e a governança política. Ele foi introduzido no Japão já no século IV d.C. (Anno Domini) e está profundamente marcado na história e na cultura do país, há milhares de anos. Este artigo toma *I am a cat* como um exemplo específico para analisar as ideias confucionistas específicas refletidas na linguagem relacional japonesa. *I am a cat* é uma obra clássica do famoso satirista japonês moderno Soseki Natsume. A partir da reflexão específica de *I am a cat*, a linguagem relacional japonesa inclui conceitos confucionistas de superioridade e inferioridade, lealdade e piedade filial, harmonia e gratidão, bem como os conceitos de propriedade, benevolência e retidão. Isso também reflete que a filosofia confucionista penetrou na linguagem japonesa relacionada. Nesta pesquisa, os alunos de japonês podem obter uma compreensão mais intuitiva do impacto do confucionismo na linguagem relacional japonesa moderna, para melhorar a eficácia do aprendizado. Isso também ajuda a desenvolver a compreensão da influência da cultura confucionista no Japão.

Palavras-chave: Confucionismo chinês. Japonês moderno. Superioridade e inferioridade. Lealdade. Piedade filial.

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Abstract: Confucian thought provides guidance on social structure and political governance. It was introduced to Japan as early as the fourth century AD (Anno Domini) and has been deeply imprinted in Japan's history and culture for thousands of years. This article takes *I am a cat* as a specific example to analyze the specific Confucian ideas reflected in Japanese relational language. *I am a cat* is a classic work by the famous modern Japanese satirist Soseki Natsume. From the specific reflection of *I am a cat*, Japanese relational language includes Confucian concepts of superiority and inferiority, loyalty and filial piety, harmony and gratitude, as well as the concepts of propriety, benevolence and righteousness. It also reflects that Confucian philosophy has penetrated into Japanese related language. In such research, Japanese learners can gain a more intuitive understanding of the impact of Confucianism on modern Japanese relational language to improve the learning effectiveness. It also helps to develop the understanding of the influence of Confucian culture on Japan.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore the influence of Confucianism on modern Japanese relational terms through literary means and to convey the author's unique views on society, ethics and human nature through the medium of fiction. By examining the intersection of Confucian values and modern contexts, the author may attempt to provide insight into the Japanese society's evolution and of its culture. Confucius (551-479 BC), the founder of Confucianism, emphasized the values of benevolence, etiquette, loyalty and filial piety, and laid out the principles of interpersonal relations and social governance.

Exploring modern Japanese relational language through a Confucian lens offers insights into values, ethical concepts, and interpersonal principles, influencing not only diplomatic policies but also educational approaches in Japan, underscoring the enduring impact of Confucianism on China's politics and foreign relations (Zhao, 2018, p. 321).

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In Japan's and China's academic circles, the "victory of Confucianism" occurred during the Han Dynasty, and it has long been overlooked that they used different terminology and research frameworks to study Confucianism. "The Japanese use Confucianism in Japanese relational language" (Lee, 2020, p. 95). The relationship among modern Japanese has been influenced by the ancient Chinese ethical culture, dominated, in turn, by Confucian, since its inception, especially after the input of Chinese characters. While Japan continuously absorbs Chinese culture, it gradually integrates Confucianism with Japanese one and forms a core spirit. Studying the application of Chinese Confucianism in modern Japanese relational language is of great practical significance for promoting cultural exchange and cooperation between China and Japan.

As the main representatives of Asian civilization, China and Japan have conducted extensive exchanges and mutual learning in terms of ideology, art, science and technology. Studying the application of Chinese Confucianism in modern Japanese relational language not only fosters cultural exchange and mutual understanding between China and Japan, but also offers insights for future cultural cooperation and development, with Confucian values, such as respect, etiquette and family-oriented virtues, being reflected in modern Japanese linguistic expressions and familial norms.

1 BACKGROUND OF THE CREATION OF *I AM A CAT*

How to observe all aspects of Confucianism in the novel, including loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, etiquette, etc., and show the influence of Confucian values through the characters' words, deeds and interactions? The use of language in the novel is analyzed, and whether it contains relevant elements of Confucianism, such as "[...] self-mockery, humility, respect, etc., and the role of these elements in interpersonal communication, are explored" (Wicking, 2020, p. 180). This paper examines the use of modern Japanese relation terms in the novel, paying special attention to whether there is a continuation or change in the traditional context of Confucianism, and the relationship between such language expression and Confucianism.

In the early 20th century, Japan had successfully shaken off the colonial pressures of Western powers in the late 19th century. During the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912), Japan undertook modern political, economic and social reforms that made it an emerging industrial nation in Asia. Japan adopted a policy of imperialist expansion in the early 20th century, seeking to secure the supply of resources and markets by acquiring territory in the Asian region. This led to acts of aggression against China, Korea and other parts of Asia, such as the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). Natsume Soseki's masterpiece *I am a cat* was published in 1905. "Japan had just emerged from colonial rule, but quickly followed the example of the United States, wielding a butcher's knife

against all Asian countries” (Bacquet, 2020, p. 28). Japan made itself wealthy by plundering neighboring countries, thereby accumulating capital. The huge compensation and supplies they seized from China and Russia went into the capitalists’ pockets, and the bourgeoisie appeared ecstatic in the face of “unexpected wealth”. They transferred huge war expenses to the Japanese people, and Japan’s laboring people’s lives became increasingly impoverished.

At the same time, the bourgeoisie is also “revitalizing” its class education, and a large number of intellectuals are beginning to serve the class, bowing to power and money. Under the West’s oppression, their spirit became sluggish, and all education was used to motivate them to continue working. Spiritual exhaustion, physical weakness, moral decline and various unfortunate events have come one after another. Wherever Japan goes, it cannot see a single inch of light, and there is only darkness in front of it. In such a situation, a group of conscientious intellectuals, like Soseki, cannot but face reality soberly, generating strong hatred and indignation towards it. *I am a cat* is a novel by Natsume Soseki, which describes the society and characters of the time through a cat’s perspective. This work criticizes the Japanese society’s hypocrisy and selfishness, and shows Natsume Soseki’s unique insight into the social phenomena of the time. Natsume Soseki lived at a time when Japan was going through a period of modernization and imperialism. The society’s drastic changes and of politics and the conflict of ideas profoundly influenced his literary creation. His works often reflect reflections on the social changes and cultural upheavals of the Meiji era.

Natsume Soseki is a master of modern Japanese literature and is known as the “national writer of Japan”. His works have had a profound impact on modern Japan and even China. In his works, people can find many factors of Chinese culture, which is inseparable from his profound understanding of Chinese literature. “Natsume Soseki is not only proficient in Chinese, but also has a profound understanding of Confucianism, which enables him to cleverly apply it to his own creations” (Trisno; Lianto, 2021, p. 11).

Confucianism is the cornerstone of Soseki’s literary creation, and it is also the spirit of his creation. It can be said that Natsume Soseki took Confucianism as the starting point for his creation. “It is precisely for this reason that Soseki’s works are not only popular in Japan, but also in China” (Rowley; Oh, 2020, p. 8). Natsume Soseki’s *I am a cat* is a famous book, featuring a poor teacher’s cat as the protagonist. Other characters include cat owners, such as Kusami and Fujitaro Suzuki. “Visiting guests and daily interpersonal relationships with neighbors involve many relational terms, which is also the reason for choosing ‘I am a Cat’ as an example” (Kleeman, 2018, p. 32).

In addition, in exploring Western worship, nationalism, money supremacy, individualism and other aspects, *I am a cat* also sharply criticizes some of the social issues brought about by Japanese civilization. Under feudal oppression, many people in the ethnic group, who longed to resist the regime, could feel Mr. Soseki’s ideas, and it was precisely

because of this that Soseki's work was widely recognized. Until now, Soseki's work still has the value of further research. When writing the book *I am a cat*, Shushi cleverly applied traditional Chinese culture and Confucianism to describe various social ills and phenomena during the Meiji period, as well as modern Japanese relational language. This article explores how Confucianism influenced the use of Japanese relational language in his writing through the book *I am a cat*.

2 EMBODIMENT OF CONFUCIANISM, IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MODERN JAPANESE, IN *I AM A CAT*

2.1 EMBODIMENT OF THE “CONCEPT OF SUPERIORITY AND INFERIORITY”, IN MODERN JAPANESE, IN *I AM A CAT*

The moral spirit in *I am a cat* can be studied and elaborated in the following directions:

Social responsibility: “To unify the family, govern the country, and calm the world”: whether the hero shows a sense of responsibility to the family, the country and the whole society in the novel is analyzed. How this sense of responsibility is reflected in the protagonist's words, actions and decisions, as well as his concern for social stability and harmony, is explored.

Spiritual pursuit: “Early to hear the Tao, late to die”: whether the protagonist has a strong desire for spiritual pursuit is researched. How he has pursued moral, intellectual, or other spiritual realms in his life and the impact this has had on himself and his surroundings are examined.

Resolute character and positive attitude towards life: the protagonist's character characteristics are analyzed, focusing on whether he shows perseverance and fortitude. His attitude and behavior, in the face of difficulties and adversity, and how his positive life attitude affects the people and things around him are studied. Western civilization advocates the ethical concepts of “equality” and “fraternity”. People, regardless of their status in morality and law, have a common principle that emphasizes equality among people. The term “universal love” focuses on people's mutual care, so in the use of relationships, it is more of a sense of solemnity rather than superiority. As part of the Yellow River civilization, Japanese relational language has been greatly influenced by Confucianism. “In their interactions with people, they focus on the special relationships between people and people, people and groups, groups and groups” (Sukhoverkhov; Klimenko; Tkachenko, 2021, p. 235). The usual standards of right and wrong do not necessarily work, but rather, it is necessary to first understand who the object is and what relationship it has with oneself before making a judgment. This is reflected

in the fact that there are not only formal and informal (solemn and simple) distinctions in relational language, but also differences between respecting oneself and being humble.

In *I am a cat*, one can see the differences in status between different identities, such as Suzuki and his friends, between teachers and students, and between masters and servants. “The embodiment of the concept of superiority and inferiority can be seen from these relationships” (Ramsey, 2004, p. 81). People with higher status are generally referred to as “sir”, “professor”, “grandpa”, etc., to show respect. However, when it comes to people of lower status, they tend to maintain a humble attitude and abide by etiquette, which is the superiors’ respect towards subordinates. Secondly, the description of family and family background in the work has a significant impact on a person’s identity in traditional beliefs. “Although these details are not explicitly mentioned in ‘I am a Cat’, the author’s consideration and shaping of identity and status can also be seen from certain character names, family backgrounds, and other aspects” (Vassil, 2016, p. 299).

In addition, there are descriptions of gender differences in *I am a cat*. For example, women need to be elegant, gentle and kind, while men need to have masculinity, perseverance, determination, and so on. This differentiated demand is well reflected in his works and is also an expression of a sense of superiority and inferiority. The various relational terms used in *I am a cat* demonstrate the value and significance of the concept of superiority and inferiority, which has had a profound impact on Japanese society’s various aspects. They not only demonstrate an understanding of social structure and order, but also show respect for each other’s etiquette. However, it can also be seen that, due to the society’s relatively closed nature, its various limitations and problems are also worth people’s reflection.

Superiority and inferiority: *I am a cat* may depict the protagonist’s observation of social phenomena, reflecting the concept of superiority and inferiority in Confucian thought. The characters’ criticism of social injustice and reflection on their own situation reflect the complexity of the relationship between human and society in Confucianism.

The concept of loyalty and filial piety: Natsume Soseki presents the concept of loyalty and filial piety, in the modern Japanese relationship language, through his novels. The importance of loyalty and filial piety in Confucianism is reflected in the characters’ respect for family and elders and their reverence for traditional values.

Harmony and gratitude: Confucianism emphasizes harmony in interpersonal relationships and gratitude to others. In the novel, the interaction among the characters may emphasize the importance of harmonious coexistence, while reflecting Confucian ethics through the emotional expression of gratitude.

Etiquette concept: *I am a cat* may present the embodiment of Confucian etiquette concept. The characters' mannerisms and their handling of social situations reflect the influence of Confucian etiquette on the language of modern Japanese relations.

The concept of benevolence: through the caring, understanding and attention to the others' situation in the novel, the embodiment of the Confucian concept of benevolence, in the modern relationship language, can be learned. This reflects the concern for the vulnerable groups in the society and embodies the values of benevolence. The idea of putting people first places more importance on worldly wisdom than anything else, which also stems from Confucianism.

Confucianism believes that couples should be different; men and women should be close to each other; rulers and ministers should be faithful and righteous. If these three things are done well, then the other things can be done well (Park *et al.*, 2019, p. 91).

The ethical concept advocated by Confucianism that “the ruler is the rule of the vassal; the father is the rule of the son; the husband is the rule of the wife” constitutes the existence of hierarchical concepts in Japanese society, such as upper and lower levels, seniors and juniors. This has led to the use of relational terms that still exist today, such as the distinction between men and women, the order of age and the degree of hierarchy, thus maintaining the Japanese society's normal order. The wife asked her husband in a serious tone, while the husband asked her in a casual one. From this, it can be seen that Japanese people, influenced by Confucianism, still adhere to the class concept of “male superiority and female inferiority” and “distinction between superiority and inferiority” in their language expression, especially in the use of relational language.

As for the origin of the criticism of benevolence and virtue in *I am a cat*, the following directions for research and elaboration may be considered:

The definition of “benevolence” and “virtue” in literary works: the specific definition and understanding of “benevolence” and “virtue” in novels are analyzed, and the protagonist's or other characters' views on these two concepts, in the story, are explored, as well as how the author presents these definitions through their words and actions.

The historical and social context of criticism: the historical period and social context, in which literary works, are located are examined to study whether there is a current of criticism of traditional moral concepts at that time, as well as the roots and motivations of these criticisms.

The protagonist's attitude towards benevolence and virtue: the protagonist's attitude towards benevolence and virtue, in the novel, is analyzed to study whether the protagonist

holds critical views and how he treats traditional moral concepts, including accepting or resisting them.

The relationship between social change and moral concept: whether the novels reflect the influence of social change on moral concept is examined. Whether social change has led to criticism of benevolence and virtue, and how this change is reflected in works are analyzed.

2.2 EMBODIMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF LOYALTY AND FILIAL PIETY IN MODERN JAPANESE LANGUAGE IN *I AM A CAT*

“Loyalty to the monarch” and “filial piety to relatives” are two major elements of Confucius’ ideology. A person who is good at giving advice always thinks of his ruler. People who eat delicious food always think of their parents. They regard the monarch as a solid support for their own ideals, and are therefore highly regarded (Bloom; Solotko, 2003, p. 27).

At all times, one should show respect and gratitude to their parents for their upbringing, which is the Confucian demeanor. Japanese people generally believe that only themselves or their families are worth cherishing, and it is unethical and egoistic to put everything in jeopardy for their career or others. The concept of loyalty and filial piety is a part of the Confucian “ritual”, while loyalty to the country and filial piety to parents are a measure of whether a person is worthy of respect. In ancient times, especially during the shogunate era, Japanese samurai people adhered to the concept of “loyalty and filial piety” and were loyal to their generals and lords. “This samurai spirit also took on new significance in today’s Japanese society” (Matsumoto; Okamoto, 2003, p. 27). Loyalty and filial piety do not refer to a person, but to the group to which they belong. It emphasizes the importance of loyalty and filial piety within an organization, and the society’s organizational structure is also manifested in the form of “honor for all and lose for all”.

In terms of language expression, the internal organization is a community. It must be consistent with the identity of “respected” and still use respectful expressions towards customers. Narrated from a cat’s perspective, *I am a cat* not only depicts the natural world’s scenery and atmosphere, but also involves various human affairs. This fusion gives the novel rich levels and wide coverage, providing readers with a comprehensive understanding of nature and human life. The novel skillfully embodies Chinese Confucianism in the characters’ interaction and relationship. By reflecting on loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, etiquette and righteousness, the novel demonstrates the profound influence of Confucian values on Japanese society. This makes *I am a cat* not only a literary work, but also an in-depth discussion of Confucian culture.

In *I am a cat*, the self-deprecating verb is used to introduce one's leader to the guest. The reason for this is that, from the speaker's, the listener's and the person's in the topic perspective, there exists a common interest of coexistence and prosperity between the person in the topic and the speaker. Linking them together to form an "internal" group, they can sacrifice themselves and unite in order to respect foreign guests. This statement of "internal and external differences" neglects the distinction between the upper and lower, and emphasizes the distinction between the inner and outer. Therefore, it can also be understood as a Japanese attitude of "loyalty" to the collective, reflecting the influence of Confucianism in current relational language.

The concept of "filial piety" is greatly reflected in both ancient and modern Japanese. In contemporary Japan, due to the mentality of "valuing the United States towards Europe", young people generally abandon complex relational language in language applications, based on their families. Only when writing letters to their parents, they do use a humble and respectful tone. The concept of "filial piety" is reflected in both ancient and modern Japan. This reflects Confucian values that emphasize respect and obedience to parents. In contemporary Japan, while young people may have abandoned the complex language of relationships in other contexts, they maintain a humble and respectful tone when communicating with their parents, reflecting loyalty to family values. Suzuki's friends express gratitude and respect for each other, which reflects the philosophy of "peace is precious" and "gratitude". This positive value holds an important place in Japanese culture, reflecting the care and emphasis placed on human relationships.

I am a cat describes Suzuki's family life, showing Mr. Suzuki's loyalty and filial piety to his parents. Although Mr. Suzuki is not rich, he attaches great importance to family harmony, is strict with himself, and cares about his children's growth and future. His children show respect and filial piety to their parents in their actions, words and emotional expressions. For example, Miss Ishida guards her father's grave after his death, which shows her respect for filial piety and loyalty.

In short, the relationship language in *I am a cat* reflects not only the concept of supremacy, but also the concept of loyalty and filial piety, fully demonstrating the importance of these values in traditional Japanese culture. This cultural emphasis on various life connections runs through family, society, teacher-student and friendship relationships. By thinking deeply about these concepts, people can see the colorful life and the human nature's richness, and, at the same time, stimulate the reflection and practice of these values.

2.3 EMBODIMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CONCEPTS OF “HARMONY IS PRECIOUS” AND “GRATITUDE”, IN MODERN JAPANESE, IN *I AM A CAT*

From the book *I am a cat*, people can see the ideas of “gratitude” and “harmony is precious”. Firstly, the Japanese believe that the traditional concept of “harmony is precious” is very important. It emphasizes the premise of harmonious coexistence and mutual respect in society, schools and work, and continuously promotes and develops mutual friendship on this basis. In the book *I am a cat*, the protagonist Mr. Suzuki meets with several friends, drinks and plays music, and recites poetry in opposition. This series of behaviors fully reflects the spirit of “harmony is precious”. Whether discussing political matters or private matters, they can get along well without any differences. In addition, some content related to etiquette, norms and morality is also mentioned in this book, which is an extension of “harmony is precious”. Secondly, in the book *I am a cat*, “gratitude” is also an important manifestation of relational language. The male protagonist Shinichi Suzuki once said that he is very grateful to his wife and regards her as a confidant and soul mate. His gratitude to his wife not only reflects the gratitude between husband and wife, but also reflects the traditional Confucian philosophy.

In the modern world, the popularity of digital media has led to fundamental changes in the way people communicate with one another. Smart phones, SMS, email, voice notes and so on have become the main communication tools. In this digital age, the importance and relevance of digital media etiquette can be emphasized and explained from the perspective of Chinese Confucianism and Japanese etiquette, especially for younger audiences.

Japanese etiquette emphasizes the use of words to express respect and care. In digital media, the choice of words should be accurate and respectful to avoid misunderstanding or offending others. In digital media, responding to messages in a timely manner shows attention to the other person. This is in line with the Confucian emphasis on interpersonal intimacy and the importance of prompt response in Japanese etiquette. In addition, several of Suzuki’s friends also express gratitude and respect towards one another, which is also a spirit of “peace is precious”. In short, from *I am a cat*, people can see the concepts of “harmony is precious” and “gratitude” contained in the work. Through the description of the relationship between Japanese and people, the positive values can not only reflect the essence of Japanese traditional culture, but also provide some enlightenment for today’s society.

2.4 EMBODIMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF “PROPRIETY, BENEVOLENCE, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS”, IN MODERN JAPANESE RELATIONS, IN *I AM A CAT*

In the book *I am a cat*, the three concepts of “propriety, benevolence, and righteousness” have been reflected in many occasions. Firstly, in traditional Japanese culture, “etiquette” is a very important concept that emphasizes that people should follow certain

social norms and etiquette when interacting. Suzuki and her friends are able to follow these etiquette and guidelines well in different situations. For example, when drinking alcohol, clinking glasses with each other to show respect, behaving appropriately and speaking appropriately are all the same words as “etiquette”. Confucius said, “Excessive intimacy can lead to mutual neglect, solemnity and lack of intimacy. Therefore, the intimacy between gentlemen should be limited to a level of sufficient joy and solemnity that is in line with etiquette in communication”. The meaning is that a gentleman’s level of closeness is enough to have a pleasant interaction with others, and the seriousness is enough to maintain politeness towards him, that is, to advocate that a gentleman’s interaction should grasp appropriate standards. This is particularly evident in modern Japanese, especially in the context of strict hierarchical concepts and emphasis on internal and external relationships, where “etiquette” is used as a criterion for communication.

In Confucianism, it is emphasized that individuals should restrain themselves, follow etiquette norms and embody benevolence in daily behavior. “Restrain oneself, return to rites as benevolence” emphasizes the realization of benevolence by restraining one’s desires and following etiquette norms. In this context, there are also specific etiquette norms for addressing family members or others to express respect and care for others. In Japanese, addressing one’s own wife as “wife”, “Jianeī”, and so on, means humility towards one’s own behavior and showing respect to guests. This is similar to the Confucian belief that “in ancient times, it was recorded that restraining oneself and returning to etiquette is called benevolence”. This language use that balances interpersonal communication with etiquette and law, although cumbersome, is also unique. Although many ethnic groups around the world value treating others with courtesy, there are not many ethnic languages that express respect for each other in different language forms. The strict rules and wide range of usage of Japanese language relational terms are the result of the infiltration of Confucianism for thousands of years. This is a language that measures the scale of communication among people through etiquette and law, which is both cumbersome and unique. Although many countries around the world place great emphasis on etiquette, few countries use various languages to show respect. Japanese language is strictly regulated and widely used, which is also the result of thousands of years of Confucian influence.

Hierarchy and equality: traditional Confucian society has a clear hierarchy, but this does not mean that equality is excluded. In modern times, the spirit of respect and understanding for others can be drawn from Confucianism and applied to gender equality. Respect for the others’ values and roles contributes to an equal partnership.

Respect for the others’ value: Confucianism emphasizes individual responsibility and respect for others. This idea can lead to a better understanding, respect and appreciation

of others, regardless of gender. In an equal partnership, mutual respect is the key to building a solid foundation.

Emphasis on etiquette and communication: traditional Confucianism focuses on etiquette and proper codes of conduct. In modern society, this emphasis on etiquette can help promote more equal and respectful communication between men and women. “By respecting each other’s point of view and communicating with kindness, a healthier and more equal relationship can be built” (Lemke, 2023, p. 69).

Fostering family and social responsibility: Confucianism focuses on individual social responsibility, a concept that can lead the modern generation to a better understanding of equal responsibility within the family and society. The concept of equal partnership between men and women can be further strengthened so that the family’s each member can share responsibilities and live in harmony.

In addition, there are also some scenes related to marriage and family in the work, such as getting married, visiting father-in-law, etc. These scenes are also aimed at highlighting mutual respect among people, complying with social norms and, thus, demonstrating the importance of “etiquette”. Secondly, traditional Japanese Confucianism believes that “benevolence” is a person’s highest moral quality, which means being kind to others, willing to help others and caring for them. In *I am a cat*, Mr. Suzuki shows a kind of “benevolence” towards his wife, friends and everyone around him. At the same time, the book also shows people reaching out to help when they encounter difficulties, and these stories also reflect the value of “benevolence”. “Justice” is the basic spirit of “upholding the right path, abiding by the law, maintaining justice, and executing justice”. In the work *I am a cat*, although there are no legal disputes or cases involved, from the social, academic, family and other aspects presented in the work, people always pay attention to the spirit of “righteousness”, adhere to their own life path, view problems with a fair eye and fight against bad customs.

In short, the relational language in the book *I am a cat* includes various values, such as “propriety”, “benevolence” and “righteousness”, and demonstrates the principles and standards that people should follow when dealing with interpersonal relationships at multiple levels. Although these values all come from Japanese traditional culture, the essence and wisdom can still bring enlightenment and reference to people.

2.5 MODERN JAPANESE RELATIONS UNDER THE DOMINATION OF “MORAL CONCEPTS”

If “benevolence” is the affinity among people, then “righteousness” is a norm for people. The unity of “morality, virtue, benevolence, righteousness, and propriety” is the foundation of Confucianism. Japanese culture is deeply influenced by Confucianism, and it is inevitable to have the word “morality”. In Japan, “righteousness” and “human feeling”

are mutually opposed, which is well-known to everyone. The so-called righteousness refers to the moral norms that must be followed in social life for others, such as parent-child, master servant, apprentice and other hierarchical relationships, as well as equal relationships with friends and neighbors. This is widely recognized as an ethical custom and principle that people must abide by whether they are willing or not. Human affection is the love that everyone possesses for themselves and their families, and it is the emotion that comes from the people's heart. For example, people in Japan must abide by the custom of regretting gifts on Zhongyuan Festival and at the end of the year, whether it is a "human feeling" of gratitude from the bottom of their hearts, or a "moral principle" of forced action. "Morality" is a very important concept in Japanese relations language, emphasizing the pursuit of the Tao of heaven, humanity and the universe. It is a pursuit of nature, humanity and the universe, which is consistent with the "moral concept" in Confucianism. From some scenes in *I am a cat* and the characters' speech act, people can see the ancients' reverence and pursuit of "morality". For example, when expressing their emotions and thoughts, Suzuki and others often borrow classical philosophical sentences, which contain their longing and pursuit for the realm of "morality".

The so-called righteousness refers to the moral principles that must be followed in social life for others, such as parent-child, master servant, apprentice and peer relationships, as well as for friends, neighbors and other equal relationships. "This is a recognized moral habit and principle that people should follow regardless of whether they are willing or not" (Schickore, 2011, p. 513). For example, Japan should abide by the custom of giving gifts every Zhongyuan Festival and the end of the year, whether out of gratitude or "morality". "Righteousness" is an ethics, a fundamental principle that people should follow in their dealings with others, and also a standard for their behavior and actions. In the book *I am a cat*, the author expresses his reverence and persistence for "righteousness" through a large amount of actions and words. For example, Suzuki and her friends can coexist harmoniously in different situations and never have conflicts due to differences of views, fully reflecting the true meaning of "righteousness". The "moral concept" also contains a reverence, gratitude and affinity for all things in heaven and earth, as well as care and concern for human nature. In his works, Suzuki's appreciation of nature and humanism, especially flowers, plants and food, can be said to be a manifestation of "moral concepts". In addition, he also talked about the communication and feelings between humans and nature, which is also his understanding and expression of "morality".

In short, the relational terms in *I am a cat* reflect the value and essence of "moral concepts". These values come from both Japanese traditions and the crystallization of human wisdom, which have great inspiration and reference significance for people's lives and work today. *I am a cat* takes on profound meaning through deep narrative and character description, as well as a clever fusion of Chinese Confucianism and modern Japanese relational terms. The

novel emphasizes the penetration of traditional culture into modern society and reminds people not to forget traditional wisdom and moral principles. Through the characters' actions and words, they convey the inheritance of the Confucian concepts of benevolence, loyalty and filial piety, and gratitude, highlighting the importance of these values in maintaining social harmony. Using novels as a medium, Natsume Soseki presents profound reflections on social problems and ethical dilemmas, and guides readers to reflect on the enlightenment of Confucianism on interpersonal relations, society and culture. *I am a cat* is not only a literary masterpiece, but also a profound reflection on the relationship between tradition and modernity, oriental wisdom and contemporary context, providing useful enlightenment for cultural inheritance and social progress.

3 DISCUSSION

In *I am a cat*, Natsume Soseki integrates Chinese Confucianism with modern Japanese relations through delicate narration and unique narrative perspective, presenting profound discussion.

By introducing leadership with self-deprecating verbs, the author reveals an idea of internal and external differences, emphasizing the common good and collectivism. This way of expression not only reflects the concept of co-existence and co-prosperity in Confucianism, but also reflects the loyalty to the family and the group. This expression of internal and external differences emphasizes the collective consciousness and is a unique embodiment of Confucianism in the modern context.

The inheritance of the concept of "filial piety" in the work shows the profound influence of Confucianism on human relations. In modern Japan, although young people may have abandoned complex relational terminology in other contexts, the attitude of expressing respect and gratitude to their parents maintains the traditional value of "filial piety". This devotion to family values reflects the enduring influence of Confucianism on Japanese relationships.

The work depicts the gratitude and respect Suzuki's friends have for one another, emphasizing the concepts of "peace is precious" and "gratitude". This attitude of harmonious coexistence reflects the concern and emphasis of Confucianism on interpersonal relations. Through the positive interaction among the characters, Natsume Soseki shows the positive embodiment of Confucian values in social interaction.

The work emphasizes the spirit of "peace is precious", highlighting a harmonious society's pursuit in Confucianism. This concept holds an important place in traditional Japanese culture and, through the characters' interaction in the novel, Natsume Soseki leads the reader to consider the meaning of peace and humility for society and the individual.

In summary, *I am a cat* deeply explores the influence of Confucianism on modern Japanese relational language through the depiction of human relations and language communication. Through the plot and characters of the novel, Natsume Soseki guides readers to ponder the complex application of Confucian values in contemporary society, providing a deep reflection on traditional wisdom and moral concepts.

CONCLUSIONS

In *I am a cat*, Natsume Soseki successfully blends Chinese Confucianism with modern Japanese relations through his unique narrative perspective and profound character description. The self-mockery in the work, the internal and external differences of common interests, the inheritance of “filial piety”, the expression of gratitude and respect and the spirit that peace is precious all reflect the profound influence of Confucianism on human relations and language communication in Japan. Through the subtle exchanges between the plot and characters in the novel, the reader is able to appreciate the complex expression of Confucian values in the contemporary language of relations. This study provides a vivid example of a deeper understanding of Confucianism in modern Japanese society, emphasizing the importance of literary works in passing on culture and shaping values. With his unique literary creation, Natsume Soseki integrates tradition and modernity, presenting a Japanese society’s rich picture, culture and human relations, and guiding to ponder the value and challenge of Confucianism in the modern context. It is recommended that future researchers delve into other works of Japanese literature to understand the specific manifestations of Confucianism in different literary works. Through comparative analysis, a more comprehensive understanding of the universal influence and unique manifestation of Confucian ideas on Japanese literature can be understood.

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