

Collectivism and Power Distance in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

Wujuan Wang

School of Arts and Sciences, Shaanxi University of Science and Technology, Xi'an, China

Email: wangwujuan@sust.edu.cn

How to cite this paper: Wang, W. J. (2021). Collectivism and Power Distance in *A Dream of Red Mansions*. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 11, 67-82.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2021.111006>

Received: January 21, 2021

Accepted: February 7, 2021

Published: February 10, 2021

Copyright © 2021 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Based on Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions, this study examines the manifestation of collectivism and power distance in Confucian culture through the analysis of conversations in two episodes of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. The analysis was carried out through probing into the dual identity of each character involved, the messages encoded and decoded, the words and actions of each participant depicted in the conversation. Through a detailed conversation analysis, the study concludes that interdependence plays an important role in Confucian culture. The distinction between in-group and out-group members results in different expectations and treatment of the two groups in the interpersonal relationship. Hierarchy is a major feature of traditional Chinese culture; a woman's position varies in accordance with the change of her marital status, a distinctive feature of Confucian culture. The study findings are applicable to international negotiation and intercultural communication.

Keywords

Confucian Culture, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Hofstede's Theory of Cultural Dimensions, Collectivism, Power Distance

1. Introduction

Hong Lou Meng, one of the four ancient Chinese classic novels, was written in the mid-18th century during the Qing dynasty. It depicts the life and social structures of Chinese aristocracy at that time, with more than 700 distinct characters of precise description. The characters depicted vary dramatically in their walks of life, from the Emperor of the kingdom to vendors in the street. The novel has always been the interest of almost everyone in China, old or young, and the joys of some fans abroad, especially experts and scholars of various fields.

Hong Lou Meng and its two renowned English renderings have always been a rich source of study in China, namely, *A Dream of Red Mansions* translated by Yang and Yang (1994) and *The Story of the Stone* translated by Hawkes & Minford (1973-1986). Having been studied by many Chinese scholars, the two English versions “equally matched in artistic achievements and have their own merits respectively in using translation methods” (Cui & Xin, 2018), the present study would quote mostly from *A Dream of Red Mansions* for the analysis.

A simple search in CNKI (China National Knowledge infrastructure) shows that *A Dream of Red Mansions* has been the key words in 31 PhD dissertations in the past five years (2016-2020). More studies have been indexed in journal articles at home and abroad. Studies of *A Dream of Red Mansions* cover wide range of fields, including narrative, feminism, comparative literature, literature criticism and most of all, translation studies (Tian, 2019; Zheng, 2018; Cui & Xin, 2018). Studies on dialogues and kinship terms are carried out either from the perspective of translation (Liao, 2019; Yan, 2011) or from pragmatics (Ding & Yan, 2002). Few studies of the novel have been done solely from the perspective of intercultural communication.

As rapid scientific and technological renovations have accelerated economic globalization, intercultural communication and contacts among people of difference cultural backgrounds become a frequent and constant phenomenon, inevitable in our daily life. To understand each other and communicate effectively, it would be better if the participants of the communication have some knowledge and awareness of cultural differences. As is known, the first two decades of 21st century has witnessed the rapid economic growth in China, which arouses an ever-increasing interest in Chinese culture globally. However, Chinese culture, with its long history and complicated mysterious social system, makes it rather challenging for non-native Chinese speakers to understand. This article intends to make it easier for people who are interested in Chinese culture to have a better understanding of Confucian cultural values by explicating some aspects of traditional Chinese cultural values through the analysis of two selected episodes from *A Dream of Red Mansions*. On the one hand, as cultural values have great impact on both perception and communication, some knowledge and awareness of different cultural values can help us understand people that are different from us. On the other hand, many aspects of culture have deep historical roots, an understanding of Confucian cultural values can guide people who are not familiar with these values to the appreciation of some seemingly “alien” Chinese behaviors.

This article starts with the elaboration of Hofstede’s distinction between individualism society and collectivism society, and his power distance theory. Then the study provides the excerpt of the two specific conversations from the novel. Following the excerpt is a detailed analysis of the two episodes from the two forementioned dimensions. The last part is a conclusion of the study, and its practical implications have been proposed.

2. Hofstede's Theory of Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede (1980) has identified four value dimensions based on his quantitative survey of different cultures, namely individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity vs. femininity. The research has made a full impact on the study of intercultural communication. In 1994, Hofstede extended and revised his study by including more countries and regions, and a new dimension has been added to the list, that is long-term versus short-term orientation. In this article, two dimensions, individualism vs. collectivism and power distance are to be elaborated as they are best illustrated by the case analysis.

2.1. Hofstede's Distinction between Individualism and Collectivism Society

According to Hofstede (1980), individualism and collectivism have distinct differences. Individualism implies a loosely knit social framework where individuals are expected to take care of themselves and of their immediate families only, while collectivism as its opposite is characterized by a rigid social framework in which people differentiate between in-groups and out-groups; they expect their in-group members (relatives, clan, organizations) to look after and protect them and in exchange for that benefit they swear loyalty to the group. In-group goals are given priority over personal goals. In case of a conflict and disparity, personal goals would be sacrificed to preserve in-group solidarity, interdependence and harmony.

Under individualism society, independence and individual achievements are highly valued, where people are expected to be self-motivated and independent of their parents in whatever they do, and making important life decisions. Individual's personal goals take priority over their loyalty to any groups like their family or the employer.

While under collectivism, interdependence and group success are fostered, individuals are expected to be aware of their responsibility and stay loyal toward the group, the family, and the community, and in return, they will be supported and protected by the family. However, when their personal gains conflict with those of the group, they have to sacrifice the one for the many.

Self-motivation, individual thinking and personal choice are promoted in individualism society, while in collectivism society, people are taught and required to abide by the norms, respect the senior in age and in power, and a decision, even one about an individual's personal life will be deemed as wiser and more trustworthy if it is made by the group. In individualism society people are granted egalitarian relationships and equal opportunities, while in collectivism society, each one is designated certain stable hierarchical roles, depending on one's gender, age, occupation, or even one's marital status.

Solidarity is emphasized in collectivism culture, with clear distinction made between the in-group or *zijiren* in Mandarin (members of the group) and the out-group or *wairen*. Harmony among in-group members is the key, and unques-

tioning allegiance is required of all in-group members, whereas, out-group members are not entitled to the benefit of the in-group members, and they are treated aloof, not protected or supported by the group. In individualistic culture, all members have the right to be independent in making their decisions, in their freedom of choice, private property, thoughts and opinions, not to be entirely controlled by group or social values, and they respect the rights of others.

2.2. Hofstede's Power Distance Theory

According to Hofstede & Bond (1988: p. 419), power distance is “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept that power is distributed unequally”. Less powerful people in high power distance cultures believe that there is naturally a hierarchical difference between them and more powerful people; while those less powerful in low power distance assume that there should be little or no hierarchical difference between people of different powers. As in intercultural communication study, in the present study, “power” indicates the vertical disparity between members of a hierarchical society.

A power distance index (PDI) is the term created to assess a culture relative location on the power distance dimension (Hofstede, 1983). Hofstede's study concludes that countries having relatively low PDIs regard small power distances as a cultural value. Minimizing social or class inequalities is of great significance to people in these countries or regions. People are encouraged to question and challenge authority, and power is only used for legitimate purpose or convenience. In contrast, large-power-distance cultures believe that each individual has a rightful and protected place in the social structure. Less powerful members should not challenge or question the actions of those in power, and hierarchy and inequality are appropriate. People with higher social status have a right to use their power for whatever purposes and in whatever ways they desire.

According to Hofstede findings, children raised in high-PDI cultures should act with obedience without challenging or questioning their seniors, while children of low-PDI cultures are taught to question the authority and challenge their parents with reasons or justifications.

3. Two Excerpts from “*A Dream of Red Mansions*”

The two conversations selected for the analysis are not chosen at random, but on purpose.

Firstly, interpersonal relationship in Confucian culture is a concept so complicated that it baffles many people unfamiliar with the culture. However, to communicate effectively in Chinese culture, it is vital to understand the manner of interpersonal relationship in China. In the two episodes selected, each of four participants is endowed with dual identity, which further complicates the already confusing relationship in Confucian culture. A thorough analysis of the complicated relationship will help people with a better understanding of the other

less complicated relationship in the culture.

Secondly, the roles of the participants in the episodes briefly illustrate the most important system of social hierarchy in traditional Chinese culture: ruler vs. subject, father vs. son, man vs. woman. Though changing along history, hierarchical relationship still plays a significant and essential part in modern Chinese culture in a subtle way.

Thirdly, the interpersonal relationship and social hierarchy, abstract and subtle as they are, can be demonstrated through the words and actions of the participants in the selected conversations.

That is why the two sample episodes are chosen, as both convey the Confucian values in a certain way.

The first conversation proceeds between Yuan-chun and her father in Chapter 18 “Yuan-chun Visits Her Parents on the Feast of Lanterns. Tai-yu Helps Her True Love by Passing Him a Poem”. It happens after Yuan-chun, the Imperial Consort, has been greeted by her grandmother and other ladies of the family. Her father asks after her and they exchange opinions.

Episode One:

When the ladies of the family had spoken with feeling about their separation and all that had happened since, Chia Cheng from outside the door-curtain asked after the health of his daughter, and she in turn paid her respects.

With tears she told him, “Simple farmers who live on prickles and dress in homespun at least know the joys of family life together. What pleasure can I take in high rank and luxury when we are separated like this?”

With tears too he replied, “Your subject, poor and obscure, little dreamed that our flock of common pigeons and crows would ever be blessed with a phoenix. Thanks to the Imperial favor and the virtue of our ancestors, your Noble Highness embodies the finest essences of nature and the accumulated merit of our forbears—such fortune has attended my wife and myself.

“His Majesty, who manifests the great virtue of all creation, has shown us such extraordinary and hitherto unknown favor that even if we dashed out our brains we could not repay one-thousandth part of our debt of gratitude. All I can do is to exert myself day and night, loyally carry out my official duties, and pray that our sovereign may live ten thousand years as desired by all under heaven.

“Your Noble Highness must not grieve your precious heart in concern for your ageing parents. We beg you to take better care of your own health. Be cautious, circumspect, diligent and respectful. Honor the Emperor and serve him well, so as to prove yourself not ungrateful for His Majesty’s bountiful goodness and great kindness.”

Then it was Yuan-chun’s turn to urge her father to devote himself to affairs of state, look after his health and dismiss all anxiety regarding her (Yang & Yang, 1994: pp. 224-225).

The second one is a conversation among the chief steward of Prince Chungshun, Bao-yu and his father in Chapter 33 titled "A Jealous Younger Brother Tells Tales. A Worthless Son Receives a Fearful Flogging". One day, when Chia Cheng, exasperated, was scolding Pao-yu for his lack of spirit when meeting with Yu-tsun, an official related to Chia, a visitor came unexpected.

Episode 2:

Before he (Chia Cheng) could say more, however, an officer from the household of Prince Chungshun was announced.

Somewhat taken aback Chia Cheng wondered what this meant, for in general they had no dealings with this prince. He ordered the man to be shown in at once and, hurrying to meet him, found that it was the chief steward of the prince's household. He hastily offered him a seat in the reception hall and tea was served.

The chief steward did not beat about the bush.

"Excuse the presumption of this intrusion," he said. "I come at the order of the prince to request a favor. If you, my lord, will grant it, His Highness will remember your kindness and I shall be infinitely indebted to you."

More mystified than ever, Chia Cheng rose to his feet with a smile.

"What instructions have you for me, sir, from the prince?" he asked. "I beg to be enlightened so that I may do my best to carry them out."

The chief steward gave a faint smile.

"There is no need for you, my lord, to do more than say one word," he answered. "There is in our palace an actor by the name of Chi-kuan, who plays female roles. He had never previously given any trouble, but several days ago he disappeared. After searching the city for him without success, we instituted careful inquiries. We are told by eight out of every ten persons questioned that he has recently been on the closest terms with your esteemed son who was born with jade in his mouth. Of course, we could not seize him from your honorable mansion as if it were an ordinary household. So we reported the matter to His Highness, who says he would rather lose a hundred other actors than Chi-kuan, for this clever well-behaved lad is such a favorite with our master's father that he cannot do without him. I beg you, therefore, to ask your earnest request and to save me from wearing myself out in a fruitless search."

He concluded this speech with a bow.

Alarmed and scandalized, Chia Cheng summoned Pao-yu, who hurried in without knowing why he was wanted.

"You scoundrel!" thundered his father. "Not content with shirking your studies at home, you commit such wicked crimes outside! Chi-kuan is in the service of Prince Chungshun; how dare a wretch like you lure him away and bring calamity on me?"

Pao-yu on hearing this was consternated.

"I know nothing about it," he cried. "I've never even heard the name Chi-kuan, let alone lured him away."

He burst into tears.

Before Chia Cheng could speak again the chief steward said with a sardonic smile:

“It is useless to keep it a secret, sir. Tell us whether he is hiding here or where else he has gone. A prompt avowal will save us trouble and win you our gratitude.”

Still Pao-yu denied any knowledge of the matter.

“You may have been misinformed, I’m afraid,” he muttered.

The steward gave a scornful laugh.

“Why deny it when we have proof? What good can it do you force me to speak out before your noble father? If you never heard of this actor, how is it that you wear his red sash round your waist?”

Pao-yu was thunderstruck and stood aghast. “How did they find out?” he wondered. “If they’ve even found such secrets, it’s not much use trying to keep the rest from them. Better send him off before he does any more blabbing.

So he said, “If you know so much, sir, how is it you are ignorant of something as important as his purchase of property? I am told that twenty li to the east of the city, in a place called, he has bought a house and a few mu of land. I should think he might possibly be there.”

The chief steward’s face brightened.

“He must be there if you say so. I shall go and investigate. If we find him, well and good. If not, we shall come back for further enlightenment.”

He took a haste leave.

Chia Cheng’s eyes were nearly bursting from his head with rage. As he followed the chief steward out, he turned to order Pao-yu:

“Stay where you are. I shall deal with you presently.”

He escorted the steward all the way to the gate..

(Yang & Yang, 1994: pp. 478-479)

4. Manifestation of Collectivism in Confucian Cultures

Collectivism fosters interdependence and group success. A person in this interdependence group tends to be sensitive to his or her position as above, below, or equal to others (King & Bond, 1985). The large negative score (−97) of China’s rating on the individualism-collectivism dimension in Hofstede’s (1991) study indicates that Chinese culture prefers collectivism.

4.1. The Hierarchy and Interdependence of Collectivism Culture

The first episode is a dialogue between Chia Yuan-chun and Chia Cheng.

Yuan-chun, the Imperial Consort, is an envoy of the royal family as well as Chia Cheng’s daughter, while Chia Cheng is a senior officer and Yuan-chun’s father, that is: he is a subject of the king and the father of the Imperial Consort. Their dual identity, namely, ruler vs. subject and daughter vs. father relationship makes the conversation quite unusual and somewhat formal.

It is unusual because it does not sound like an ordinary conversation between a father and a daughter in the collectivism culture of ancient China, as China is a patriarchic society, where “male members of a society tend to predominate in positions of power; with the more powerful the position, the more likely it is that a male will hold that position”, as defined in Wikipedia. In the monarchy, the monarch or the emperor is the sovereign ruler of the whole empire, all officials and the rest of the people being the subjects. Similarly, the father is the predominant member and authoritative figure of the family, who is highly powerful and shoulders the responsibility of honoring the family. And the offspring should be in deference to the father. As a daughter, Chia Yuan-chun is supposed to show respect and obedience to her father, but as she marries the emperor, she becomes a member of the royal family, with a nobler title and a new identity. This new identity gives her much edge over her father on the dialogue, which in turn makes it much more complicated.

As the novel hints on many occasions that Yuan-chun’s being selected as Imperial Consort has much to do with the nobleness and power of her original family. Prior to her conversation with her father, Yuan-chun, greeted by the ladies of the family, complained that she was “*sent away* to that forbidden place, it hasn’t been easy getting this chance today to come home”, which indicates that her marriage was arranged without her consent. As was the case with girls in ancient China, they were not allowed to make major life decisions like marriage on their own. The decision was made for them by the elders in charge of the family, usually, their parents. Once they got married, the girls would no longer be treated as a member of the in-groups, but as a guest, hence an out-group member to her parents’ home.

While on the other hand, in the episode, “Chia Cheng from outside the door-curtain asked after the health of his daughter”, it is not Chia Cheng the father who stood aloof, showing respect to the daughter, but Chia Cheng the subject who asked after a member of royal family. It indicates that in patriarchic society, monarch or members of the royal family, being the top in the hierarchical system, stand above the subjects.

In the dialogue, Chia Cheng’s role as a subject surpasses that of a father. That is why the dialogue sounds so formal. The background stands out. The episode takes place when Yuan-chun, having been selected as the Imperial Consort of Phoenix Palace, visits her parents on the feast of lanterns. Her visit is a formal and significant event to the royal family, and a far more important event to the family Chia (Li, 1996).

Chia Cheng tells Yuan-chun that she should take good care of herself and her husband, the Emperor, as he believes that the fact that the Emperor’s dotting on Yuan-chun has brought and will bring great fortune to him and the whole family.

In the latter half of the dialogue, Chia Cheng pleads with Yuan-chun not to worry about her “ageing parents”, but to take better care of her own health. Only with “good health, caution, circumspection, diligence and respect”, can Yuan-

chun serve and honor the Emperor well, to repay “His Majesty’s beautiful goodness and great kindness” towards the family. He knows well that if Yuan-chun serves the Emperor well, the Emperor will bestow more favor on her, and her good fortune well surely extends to her original family; if Yuan-chun falls out of favor, her bad luck will infect the family as well. To some extent, he suggests that Yuan-chun, alone from her home, should sacrifice herself for the prospect of the whole family in the long run. On the other hand, her original family will be her backbone if she has trouble in the palace. What happens later proves the point. In Chapter 83 “the Imperial Consort falls ill and her relatives call at the palace”, as the title shows, when Yuan-chun falls ill, Family Chia falls out of favor too, and it starts to be on the wane. The whole family falls apart in Chapter 95 when rumor of the death of Yuan-chun, the imperial consort comes true.

We can see that interdependence plays such an important role in the interpersonal communication in Chinese culture that it can be safely concluded that a person’s ups and downs are closely related to his or her family, and vice versa. Moreover, whatever a person does, it has to be related with his or her family. The same is true of the second episode.

The second conversation happens when the chief steward of Prince Chungshun, in pursuit of a favorite actor of the Prince’s father named Chi-kuan, comes to Chia Cheng, with the intention of getting information from Pao-yu, Chia Cheng’s son of the whereabouts of Chi-kuan. At the news that his son has some affair with an actor, Chia Cheng is enraged, and he is even more embarrassed and infuriated when he learns that the actor is related to a prince, a royal family member.

Chia Cheng’s fury is not without reason. Firstly, in ancient China, actors and actresses (“*xizi*” the umbrella term for them in Mandarin) were deemed a “plaything”, a profession of lowest moral values, and were despised by almost all of the society. It is really embarrassing to Chia Cheng to be informed of the scandal that his son might have an affair with a *xizi*. And secondly, his son’s “loose” behavior has brought him into conflict with the interest of a prince, a person in a much higher power. In collectivism culture, no one stands a chance to challenge the will of those in power. Chia Cheng was so enraged that he called his son “scoundrel” and “a wretch” and accused him of bringing “calamity” on him.

On the other hand, according to the chief steward, Chi-kuan’s disappearance results from his close relation with the Pao-yu, for Chi-kuan was previously an obedient actor. It was Pao-yu who should be held responsible for the rebellious action of Chi-kuan’s flee. Confucius says that a father should be responsible for his son’s fault, for when a son makes mistakes, it is the father who fails his duty to raise and educate his son properly. Thus, Chia Cheng should be held accountable for the trouble his son brings to Prince Chungshun. Pao-yu’s mischievous behavior results from the irresponsibility of his father. Chia Cheng thinks that he loses “face” and “dignity” and that Pao-yu’s contact with Chi-kuan brings “calamity” on him.

All these lead to the conclusion that a person in Confucian culture is not an

isolated individual concerned with personal gains and voluntary group membership; rather, as a member of the family, a person has the obligations to seek the common good for the benefit of the family, with his or her gains and losses closely related to the family.

4.2. The Distinction between In-Group and Out-Group and the Principle of Politeness

According to Confucius, harmony is the key issue. Social relations should be conducted so that everyone's face is maintained. Face (*mianzi* in Mandarin) is a concept familiar to most Asians. In sociolinguistics, face is usually defined as *the negotiated public image, mutually granted each other by participants in a communicative event*. When people of collectivism culture meet each other in a communicative situation, they make assumptions about the face they want to claim for themselves and intend to give to others. Often, indirect language is used to avoid embarrassing confrontations and politeness is highly valued as it preserves face. Chinese observe the principle of politeness in their everyday speaking practices, especially when talking with people who holds a higher position. The ritual of "politeness" is most preeminent in the Chinese host-guest context (Cheng, 1990: pp. 510-515).

4.2.1. Daughters and Sons: Different Expectations

As forementioned, Chia Cheng's dialogue with Yuan-chun is not in the tone of an ordinary father, the authority of the family, but in the tone of a subject to his ruler. There seems to be a psychological distance between them. Yuan-chun is a guest from the royal family more than she is the daughter of the family, and as a guest, she becomes an out-group.

In Confucian culture, married woman is no longer a member of her original family, as the Chinese saying goes, a married daughter is just like water that has been poured, i.e., she doesn't belong to her original family anymore. Her status goes higher or lower when she gets married in accordance with whom she marries. Generally speaking, in ancient China, the best expectation for a girl in the family is to marry well—marry someone with a higher status, thus uniting two families for a more prosperous goal. In this case, Yuan-chun marries the emperor, her status is so promoted that she stands higher than all her original family members, who, despite their tender love and concern for her, treat her with awe and respect as a guest and a ruler rather than an in-group member.

While for sons, things are quite different. As the successor and hope of the family, sons are expected to live up to the family's expectations, and to bring honor to the family, so called "*bu fu hou wang*" in Mandarin, which is highly cherished in Chinese culture (Liu, 1999). That is why Chia Cheng is so enraged and disappointed when he learns his son's misbehavior that he almost flogs him to death.

4.2.2. The Principle of Politeness

In traditional Chinese culture, modesty and humbleness are two values that are

highly appreciated, and politeness embodies these values.

Scollon & Wong (2004) categorize politeness system in interpersonal communication into three different types: deference politeness system, solidarity politeness system and hierarchical politeness system. Deference politeness system is one between participants who are equals or near equals but maintain a deferential distance; solidarity politeness system can be exemplified by two close friends who feel and express closeness mutually; while in hierarchical politeness system, the participants recognize and respect the social differences that put one in a higher position and the other in a lower position.

An examination of the two episodes leads naturally to the conclusion that the four participants in the two conversations do not assume each other as equals, but as higher or lower in social position.

In the first episode, Yuan-chun, being projected a higher position as the Imperial Consort, speaks “down” to her father, who assumes the role of the subject of the Emperor, in a polite and formal manner.

In the second episode, the chief steward, who is only a helper of another noble family and in a humble position as compared to that of Chia Cheng, the lord, is treated with awe and politeness by Chia Cheng, because the steward is regarded as an envoy from a member of a royal family, a prince, to whom Chia Cheng must show his respect. Thus, Chia Cheng behaves in a condescending manner when talking to the steward, for example, by offering the steward a seat and serving him tea and by abusing and scolding his dear son to give him “face”.

While the chief steward knows well his advantage as an envoy and takes the advantage of being a guest, disclosing the fact of Pao-yu’s affair with Chi-kuan. He assures his position by saying that he comes at the order of His Highness, and then he commands Chia Cheng to do him a favor in such a manner as if he were the Prince himself. His arrogance is further demonstrated when he indicates that if it is an ordinary family, they could have seized Pao-yu and questioned him in some other way. His somewhat rude behavior discloses his true thought that his visit and “polite” enquiry of Pao-yu are a symbol of honor or respect for Family Chia.

The chief steward assumes himself as being in the superordinate and Chia Cheng in a subordinate position. And Pao-yu, Chia Cheng’s son, is projected as in the lowest position by the others in the episode.

When Pao-yu cries and denies his contact with Chi-kuan, the steward interrupts him with a sardonic smile even before Chia Cheng could speak again, indicating that he plays the role of a judge, while the other two are his accused. He warns and threatens Pao-yu all through the conversation, “don’t play before your father and me, I am well informed”. Afraid of being blabbed more, Pao-yu, “thunderstruck and aghast”, tells the truth. Before going away, the chief steward intimidates them by saying if Chi-kuan could not be found there, he would come again. Chia Cheng bears and forbears the insult from the chief steward for the purpose of maintaining harmony with the Prince. He knows that he has to control his emotion lest he violate the ritual propriety and be in conflict with the

steward, not preserving the face of the Prince. When the out-group member has gone and the door is closed, he flogs Pao-yu mercilessly.

In Confucian culture, it is important to keep in mind that family and group interests come first; sacrifices of an individual are inevitable if necessary; in-group members can depend on the group in time of need as long as they are loyal. As harmony is a goal in many circumstances, people try to claim face for themselves and preserve face for others to avoid conflicts.

5. Manifestation of High Power Distance in Confucian Culture

Hofstede's (1991) survey shows China scores pretty high in country and region ratings on the power distance dimension, which means Chinese culture leans mostly towards high power distance.

A high-PDI culture believes that the action of the authorities should not be challenged or questioned, and that hierarchy and inequality are appropriate and beneficial.

In accordance with Hofstede's power distance theory, in high-PDI cultures, inequalities among people are desired and expected; hierarchy reflects the existential inequality between higher-ups and lower-downs.

According to Deuchler (1992), in Confucian culture, there are five basic human relationships, and the essential social virtues that correspond to each role, they are: ruler and subject (justice and loyalty), father and son (love and closeness), husband and wife (initiative and obedience), and friends (mutual faithfulness). Each of these relationships, including those among friends presumes the existence and legitimacy of a social hierarchy and the reciprocal, complementary obligations that each position in the hierarchy requires: the higher-status person in each pair must provide protection and consideration to those lower in position while the lower-status person owes respect and obedience to those in higher position. Above all, kingship relations preponderate over all the other relationships in ancient China. Additionally, there are different norms for the degree and form of the respect or obedience, depending on whether the relationship is close or distant.

5.1. Power Distance between Yuan-Chun and Chia Cheng

Children in traditional Chinese culture are expected to obey their parents without challenging or questioning them, no matter how old they are. So are the subjects. As has been exemplified in the previous section, sons are expected to comply with the wishes and requests of their parents, however old he is. But as for girls, things might be a bit different.

Confucianism governs women's conduct with the so-called three principles of obedience: a young girl should obey her father; a married woman should obey her husband; and a widow should obey her oldest son (Kim, 1979: p. 83).

That is, before marriage, a girl, as "an outsider who will leave the household" (Kendall & Peterson, 1983), has no right to choose her own husband, she must

obey the decision of the elderly in the family, usually the father. She regards him as the authority, responsible for the choice of a proper husband for her, hoping that he takes into consideration the man's family background, ability, potential property and so on. Whether she likes him or not, a girl has no choice but to accept the chosen husband, even when she is chosen the "wrong" husband. In that case, she can do nothing but to accept the cruel fact and attribute her unluckiness to her own undesirable fate.

It is true with the story of Yuan-chun. In Chia Cheng's opinion, sending Yuan-chun to the palace provides the best opportunity for her, because by marrying the Emperor, she becomes a member of the royal family, which is a great honor to her and her family. In addition, to become the father-in-law of the Emperor is the dream of almost every noble family at that time, which will bring great benefit to the family. Chia Cheng is confident of his decision. Like it or not, Yuan-chun was sent to the palace.

In Confucius culture, upon marriage, a woman becomes a member of her husband's family, at the same time, she is no longer an in-group member of her own original family (Kim, 1979: p. 89). And she is treated by her original family as a guest, or rather an outsider. It depends fully on her husband's social status to decide whether she is respected or degraded by members of her original family. Therefore, a married woman will be honored because of the honor of her husband and get degraded because of the humble identity of her husband.

In a high-PDI culture like Chinese society, people are associated with stable hierarchical roles (dependent on gender, family background, age), everyone should be aware of his or her position, and behave accordingly. If he or she violates the rule, he or she must take the consequence. That is why Chia Cheng talks to his daughter in such a special manner.

As an Imperial Consort, Yuan-chun holds relatively higher social status above her father, "a servant of the emperor" and thus her father treats her as a member and an envoy of the royal family.

At the beginning of the first conversation, Yuan-chun talks to "her father" about her homesickness. Despite the splendid life in the Palace, she misses her family. Here she tries to establish her identity as his daughter. While Chia Cheng replies her with tears as if in the common manner of a father, yet when he speaks, he is fully aware of the fact that he is speaking to a member of the royal family, who comes on the behalf of the Emperor. What's is more, as a senior official, he is supposed to talk in a formal manner. The formality in which Chia Cheng talks shows that he recognizes and respects the fact that he is inferior to Yuan-chun in social status. From this perspective, their conversation seems to be between a ruler and his subject, rather than a father and a daughter.

5.2. Power Distance between the Participants in the Second Episode

In the second episode, the chief steward of Prince Chungshun comes "at the order of the prince", whose social status is above that of Chia Cheng. Though Chia

Cheng is superior to the chief steward himself in position, he shows respect for the steward. People of the Confucian culture hold the belief that they should respect their rulers and every living creature around them deserves to be respected, including their dogs and cats, let alone their servants. Although the steward knows that he is in a humble position compared to that of Chia, and he knows that Chia's family is not an ordinary household, he guarantees his behavior by saying that he comes at the order of the Prince. He seems to be respectful toward Chia Cheng, but his manner betrays him. His blunt language, his rude interruption of the talk between the father and the son, and his occasional scornful laughs demonstrate that he, a pretender under the protection of a powerful person, is self-righteous that he is a SOMEONE.

While for Pao-yu, a child from an intellectual family, is presumed to have a fixed role in society and to enact upon the role accordingly. Cheng (1990: pp. 510-515) argues that the role determines the behavior in most East Asian cultures. According to Confucian culture, he is supposed to do "the proper things with the right person" (Bond & Hwang, 1986: pp. 213-266). In the eyes of Chia Cheng, the proper thing his son should be doing is studying "the right books" industriously to be ready for the imperial examination, pass the exam to be the Number One Scholar and bring great honor to the whole family; or he should manage to learn from and get along well with those aspirant and prospective intellectuals like Chia Yu-tsun.

What outrages Chia Cheng is that it is not an upright behavior for his son to have any relationship with an actor. Because actors, as well as those who make a living on their "arts", hold the lowest position in ancient Chinese culture. Pao-yu, making friends with an actor, degrades and brings shame to himself and his father. When Chia Cheng was told about Pao-yu's affair with Chi-kuan, who is the favorite role of "His Highness", alarmed and scandalized, he abuses and scolds his son terribly.

While Pao-yu is afraid that his father will know his affair with Chi-kuan, trying to deny the fact that he knows Chi-kuan, even later, when the steward discloses the secrets of his contact with Chi-kuan, he says that he "was told" that 'Chi-kuan purchased some land' to show that he is not very familiar with Chi-kuan. By saying so, he informs the steward of Chi-kuan's whereabouts and tries to hide his relationship with the actor. The father, as the patriarch in a traditional Chinese family, makes major decisions, and everyone in the family should obey him. And they are not supposed to question their father's authority. Pao-yu's inappropriate behaviors, being involved with an actor and lying about it, degrades and enrages his father so much that he is almost flogged to death.

To sum up, as hierarchy is the norm of Confucian culture, an awareness of one's relative position in a conversation or negotiation seems to be essential for a successful communication.

6. Conclusion and Its Practical Implications

In this article, two episodes from *A Dream of Red Mansions* have been analyzed,

with the purpose of explicating a few special values of Confucian culture by two of Hofstede's cultural dimensions: collectivism vs. individualism and power distance theory. Two conversations are analyzed from three perspectives, namely, interdependence, the distinction of in-group and outgroup members, politeness, and power distance index. The analysis indicates that Confucian culture is a typical collectivism and high-PDI culture. The study concludes that interdependence plays an important role in Confucian culture, and the distinction between in-group and out-group members results in the difference in their duties and treatment in their relations. Hierarchy is the norm and deemed appropriate in Confucian culture. Woman's positions vary in accordance with the change of her marital status, which is a distinctive feature of Confucian culture. It is hoped that the findings will help people unfamiliar with Confucian culture with a better understanding of the Chinese culture.

Despite the fact that the research findings are based on the analysis of only two episodes of a classic novel, they can be applied to many different fields in real life practices, for example, business negotiation, interpersonal communication and conflicts managing in multinational companies. To communicate or negotiate with a Chinese team or a Chinese company effectively, one should bear in mind of a few important values in Confucian culture: harmony and solidarity, interdependence, face relationship and hierarchy. Failure to recognize these complicated value systems might lead to misunderstanding or conflicts.

Further studies of the topic may include more episodes and more conversations in the analysis to reach a more persuasive conclusion. More perspectives can be taken to give a full description of Confucius culture.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Bond, M. H., & Hwang, K.-K. (1986). The Social Psychology of Chinese People. In M. H. Bond (Ed.), *The Psychology of Chinese People* (pp. 213-266). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cheng, S. K. (1990). Understanding the Culture and Behavior of East Asians—A Confucian Perspective. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 24, 510-515. <https://doi.org/10.3109/00048679009062907>
- Cui, D. D., & Xin, H. J. (2018). Translating Chinese Classics: The Case of Yang's Version of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. *Journal of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies*, 5, 88-93.
- Deuchler, M. (1992). *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Ding, J. M., & Yan, S. (2002). An Analysis of Pragmatic Ambivalence in the Character Conversations in the Novel *A Dream of Red Mansions*. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, 3, 14-16.
- Hawkes, D., & Minford, J. (Tr.) (1973-1986). *The Story of the Stone* (Vol. 1-5). London:

Penguin Books.

- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hofstede, G. (1983). Dimensions of National Cultures in Fifty Countries in Three Regions. In J. Deręgowski, S. Dzurawiec, & R. Annis (Eds.), *Explications in Cross-Cultural Psychology* (pp. 335-355). Lisse, Netherlands: Swets and Zeitlinger.
- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Culture and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. London: McGraw-Hill.
- Hofstede, G., & Bond, M. H. (1988). The Confucius Connection: From Cultural Roots to Economic Growth. *Organizational Dynamics*, 16, 5-21.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616\(88\)90009-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(88)90009-5)
- Kendall, L., & Peterson, M. (Eds.) (1983). *Korean Women: View from the Inner Room*. New Haven, CT: East Rock Press, Inc.
- Kim, Y.-C. (Ed. and Trans.) (1979). *Women of Korea: A History from Ancient Times to 1945*. Seoul: Ewha Women University Press.
- King, A. Y. C., & Bond, M. H. (1985). The Confucian Paradigm of Man: A Sociological View. In W.-S. Tseng, & D. Y. H. Wu (Eds.), *Chinese Culture and Mental Health* (pp. 29-45). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-701630-6.50009-5>
- Li, Y. M. (1996). On the significance of the Grand View Garden in *A Dream of Red Mansions* from the Patriarchic Perspective. *Journal of A Dream of Red Mansions*, 2, 91-116.
- Liao, C. X. (2019). *A Quantitative and Qualitative Study of English Translations of Dialogues in Hong Lou Meng*. Ph.D. Thesis, Shanghai: Shanghai International Studies University.
- Liu, R. L. (1999). Opposites and Inconsistency: Analyses on the Cultural Consciousness of *A Dream of the Red Mansions*. *Journal of Zhangjiakou Teachers College*, 3, 23-29.
- Scollon, R., & Wong, S. S. (2004). *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Tian, X. (2019). Narrative Rhetoric Study on the Creation of the Prelude Legend of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. *Comparative Literature in China*, 2, 152-165.
- Yan, Y. D. (2011). *A Study of English Translation of Kinship Terms in Hong Lou Meng*. Ph.D. Thesis, Shanghai: Shanghai International Studies University.
- Yang, H.-Y., & Yang, G. (Tr.) (1994). *A Dream of Red Mansions*. Beijing: Foreign Language Press Peking.
- Zheng, S. F. (2018). *A Corpus-Based Study on the Translation of Women's Language Illustrated by the Case of Wang Xifeng*. Ph.D. Thesis, Shanghai: Shanghai International Studies University.