HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

THE CONCEPT OF "HUMAN" AND THE FUNDAMENTAL CULTURAL CATEGORIES IN CHINESE LINGUOCULTURE

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Abstract: This article examines the concept of "human" in Chinese linguoculture through the analysis of Chinese folk proverbs. The study explores the linguocultural content of the human concept and identifies its relationship with key cultural categories such as 仁 (rén), 礼 (lǐ), 孝 (xiào), 面子 (miànzi), 心 (xīn), and 天 (tiān). The research is based on the theoretical foundations of cognitive linguistics, linguocultural studies, frame semantics, cognitive ethnolinguistics, and the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach. Chinese proverbs are analyzed as linguistic units reflecting the collective worldview, moral values, and cultural memory of the Chinese people. The findings reveal that the concept of "human" in Chinese linguoculture is a complex and multidimensional construct that integrates moral, social, familial, and spiritual characteristics. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the Chinese value system and provides a theoretical basis for future comparative research on Chinese and Uzbek paremiological materials.

Keywords: Chinese proverbs, linguocultural analysis, cognitive linguistics, frame semantics, Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), Confucianism, cultural categories, paremiology.

Introduction: Language is an important means of reflecting a nation's historical experience, cultural values, and worldview. The national mentality, moral norms, and social attitudes of every people find their expression in linguistic units, particularly in folklore genres. In this regard, proverbs occupy a special place as unique linguocultural units that preserve the collective memory, cultural experience, and axiological perspectives of a particular ethnic group.

Chinese proverbs embody a system of national values that has evolved over centuries, making it possible to explore the Chinese people's perceptions of human beings, society, morality, and the world. In particular, the concept of "human" is regarded as one of the central categories of Chinese culture and philosophy. Under the influence of Confucian teachings, concepts such as 仁 (rén), 礼 (lǐ), 孝 (xiào), 面子 (miànzi), 心 (xīn), and 天 (tiān) have emerged as fundamental cultural criteria that define the moral, social, and spiritual identity of an individual.

In recent years, the number of studies devoted to the concept of "human" within the frameworks of conceptology, cognitive linguistics, and linguocultural studies has increased considerably. However, there remains a lack of comprehensive research examining the interrelationship between the concept of "human" and these cultural categories in Chinese proverbs, as well as their axiological significance in the collective consciousness of the Chinese people.

The purpose of this article is to identify the linguocultural content of the concept of "human" in Chinese proverbs and to analyze the semantic and cultural functions of the concepts 仁 (rén), 礼 (lǐ), 孝 (xiào), 面子 (miànzi), 心 (xīn), and 天 (tiān), which constitute its key components. The study employs methods of linguocultural analysis, conceptual analysis, frame semantics, and cognitive ethnolinguistics.

In every culture, perceptions of human beings are expressed through certain key concepts. In traditional Chinese culture, particularly within Confucian philosophy, human nature and social relationships are associated with a number of central concepts. The most important among them are 仁 (rén) – benevolence and humanity; 礼 (lǐ) – propriety, etiquette, and ritual; 孝 (xiào) – filial piety and

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respect for parents; **面子** (miànzi) and 脸 (liǎn) – face, reputation, and social prestige; **心** (xīn) – heart (mind, emotions, and conscience); and **天** (tiān) – heaven (fate, divine power, and cosmic order). These concepts occupy a central place in the Chinese linguocultural conceptual system and are reflected directly or indirectly in Chinese folk proverbs.

Material and methods: 仁 (Rén) – The Concept of Benevolence and Humaneness. The concept of 仁 (rén) represents benevolence, humanity, and compassion. In Confucian philosophy, rén is regarded as the highest virtue and the very foundation of human nature. In fact, the Chinese character 仁 originally depicts two people and conveys the meaning of "love and care among human beings." Explaining this concept, Confucius stated: "仁者爱" ("A benevolent person loves others").

The concept of rén is reflected both directly and indirectly in numerous Chinese proverbs. For example, the proverb **"人往高处走，水往低处流"** ("People strive upward, just as water flows downward") praises the human aspiration toward excellence and moral elevation, thereby indirectly glorifying rén as an ideal of noble humanity.

Although Confucianism places rén alongside other important virtues such as 義 (yì) – righteousness, 智 (zhì) – wisdom, and 信 (xìn) – trustworthiness, rén occupies the foremost position and is recognized as the quality that makes a person truly human. This idea is also evident in Chinese proverbs, where acts of kindness, compassion, and helping others are portrayed as manifestations of rén in various forms.

A well-known Chinese saying states: "人之初， 性本善" ("At birth, human nature is inherently good"). This expression, derived from the philosophy of Mencius, promotes the idea that human beings are naturally good (善 shàn), a notion closely connected with the concept of rén. It is therefore clear that, within traditional Chinese culture, a "human being" is primarily understood as a creature endowed with kindness, compassion, and moral virtue. Consequently, the image of the "good person" is frequently idealized in Chinese proverbs. For instance, the proverb **"好人有好报"** ("Good people are rewarded with good outcomes") promotes the virtue of rén, while **"恶有恶报"** ("Evil deeds bring evil consequences") serves as a warning about the fate of those who act wickedly and lack benevolence.

礼 (Lǐ) – The Concept of Ritual, Etiquette, and Respect. The concept of 礼 (lǐ) refers to ritual, etiquette, propriety, and respect. In Confucian philosophy, lǐ represents a system of moral and social norms that maintain order and harmony within society. Although the term originally denoted ancient rituals and ceremonial practices, it gradually evolved into a broader concept encompassing codes of conduct, ethical behavior, and social decorum.

According to Confucian teachings, if 仁 (rén) is the inner moral quality of a person, then 礼 (lǐ) is the set of external behavioral rules through which that quality is expressed. In other words, lǐ serves as the practical means of realizing rén in everyday life.

The concept of lǐ appears frequently in Chinese proverbs, both explicitly and implicitly. For example, the proverb **"礼多人不怪"** ("No one is offended by a person who is courteous") emphasizes that adherence to etiquette and proper conduct is positively perceived in interpersonal relationships. Another well-known proverb, **"没有规矩不成方圆"** ("Without rules, one cannot draw a square or a circle"), metaphorically conveys the idea that society cannot function properly without norms, discipline, and moral regulations.

Through the concept of lǐ, Chinese culture promotes the idea that individuals should understand their place within society and behave accordingly. Traditional Chinese society has long regulated relationships between elders and younger people, teachers and students, as well as parents and

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children through clearly defined norms of conduct. Lǐ can therefore be understood as a social "script" that guides behavior within these relationships. It is believed that when everyone follows this script, social harmony and stability can be achieved.

A relevant example is the proverb **"长幼有序"** ("There is an order between the old and the young"), which reflects the popular understanding of lǐ and underscores the importance of respecting hierarchy and social roles.

The concept of the human being in Chinese culture cannot be fully understood without reference to lǐ. A person who lacks proper manners and moral conduct may be regarded as **"野人"** (yěrén, "a wild or uncivilized person"). Proverbs concerning such individuals usually carry negative connotations. For instance, **"不知礼无以立"** ("Without knowledge of propriety, one cannot establish oneself in society") highlights the necessity of etiquette and moral behavior for gaining social recognition and respect.

The concept of **孝** (xiào) refers to filial piety, loyalty, and respect toward one's parents. In the traditional Chinese ethical system, xiào has long been regarded as one of the highest virtues, and Confucius placed it alongside **仁** (rén) as a fundamental moral principle. A well-known saying that has attained proverbial status states: "**百善孝为先**" ("Among a hundred virtues, filial piety comes first"), emphasizing that respect for parents is considered the foremost of all moral qualities.

According to traditional Chinese beliefs, a person can become truly virtuous only by first fulfilling their duties as a son or daughter within the family. The concept of xiào encompasses not only caring for and serving one's parents during their lifetime but also preserving their honor, maintaining the family reputation, and continuing to respect and commemorate them after their death. Chinese folklore contains numerous legends, tales, and narratives that promote filial devotion. Stories about children who sacrificed their own well-being for the sake of their parents have served for centuries as moral examples illustrating the importance of xiào. In proverbs, filial piety often functions as a model for proper interpersonal relationships and social responsibility.

For example, the proverb "**养儿防老**" ("Raise children to support you in old age") reflects the traditional expectation that children will care for their parents in later life. Another proverb, "**子不教父之过**" ("If a child is not properly educated, it is the father's fault"), highlights parental responsibility in a child's upbringing. These examples demonstrate that xiào is not merely a duty of children toward their parents; rather, it is a comprehensive family-oriented concept that also includes the obligations of parents toward their children. Within Chinese culture, the concept of the human being is understood primarily through family roles. A good person is expected to be both a good child and a good parent. Conversely, the absence of xiào is viewed as one of the gravest moral shortcomings. The term "**不孝之子**" (bùxiào zhī zǐ, "an unfilial child") has traditionally been among the strongest forms of social condemnation.

For this reason, the ideal person portrayed in Chinese proverbs invariably possesses the virtue of filial piety. One illustrative example is the saying "**父母在，不远游**" ("While your parents are alive, do not travel far away"), which conveys the idea that children should remain close to and care for their parents rather than abandon them.

Through such proverbs and traditional sayings, the concept of **孝** (xiào) has become deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of the Chinese people. In the present study, proverbs reflecting xiào are analyzed separately, as they reveal the "family profile" of the concept of the human being. In particular, they help identify the qualities that are most highly valued in the role of a son or daughter within Chinese culture.

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ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
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Result and discussions: The method of cultural scripts within the framework of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) enables researchers to formalize cultural norms and values that are expressed either explicitly or implicitly in proverbs. By applying this approach, it becomes possible to identify how the Chinese people conceptualize such notions as "what a person should be like" or "how a person should behave in society."

For example, with regard to the concepts of 孝 (xiào) and 礼 (lǐ) discussed above, cultural scripts such as "A good person should treat elders with respect" **or** "A good person never forgets his or her parents" can be formulated using the NSM metalanguage and then linked to specific evidence found in Chinese proverbs. This approach allows researchers to avoid imposing external normative judgments and instead describe cultural values from the perspective of the people who share them.

Through the NSM framework, cultural scripts can be represented in a simplified and universal semantic form. For instance, a script derived from several Chinese proverbs might be formulated as follows:

People think like this:

If someone is a good person, this person wants to do good things for other people.

People think it is good when someone is like this.

Such scripts capture the common meaning underlying multiple proverbs and express the broader cultural principle that unites them. In this way, cultural scripts provide a level of abstraction that goes beyond the analysis of individual proverbs and reveal the collective cultural models embedded in folk wisdom.

Therefore, the method of cultural scripts serves as an effective tool for identifying and reconstructing the implicit moral and social norms reflected in Chinese proverbs. It allows researchers to move from the interpretation of separate linguistic units to a deeper understanding of the cultural worldview that shapes the Chinese concept of the human being.

For each thematic group of proverbs, the corresponding frame to which they belong is identified. For example, proverbs concerning the relationship between humans and society may be classified within the "social relations" frame, whereas proverbs dealing with morality and ethical behavior may belong to the "moral norms" frame. Furthermore, each key image within a proverb can activate a separate frame. For instance, in a proverb containing the metaphor "Human is a tree," the frame of the plant world is invoked to structure the interpretation of human characteristics.

According to Fillmore's Frame Semantics theory, it is possible to determine the semantic roles that constitute a proverb. In this framework, the human being may function as the agent, an action as the predicate, and society as the environment or context. Consider the proverb: "The finest gold is found in the earth; the finest person is found among the people." This proverb contains two parallel structures: gold and earth (elements of the first frame, related to valuable metal and its location), and person and community (elements of the second frame, related to social values). Here, the concept of a person is understood more fully within the frame of society, implying that an individual's worth and dignity are manifested only within a social environment.

Thus, frame analysis enables the reconstruction of the background knowledge presupposed by proverbs. During the analysis, a conceptual map is created to identify which frame elements most frequently co-occur with key concepts such as 仁 (rén), 礼 (lǐ), and 孝 (xiào). This makes it possible to determine whether, for example, the concept of rén is primarily associated with the family frame, the community frame, or the state frame.

The cognitive ethnolinguistic approach constitutes the methodological foundation of this research. A comprehensive corpus of Chinese proverbs is compiled, and all proverb meanings related

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to the concept of "human" are systematically selected and analyzed. Following Bartmiński's principle of cognitive definition, a reconstruction of the folk image of the concept "Human" **(人)** is developed.

This reconstruction consists of several facets:

Anthropological facet – characteristics that define a human being, such as walking, speaking, and other biological and social attributes.

Moral facet – positive and negative character traits, including benevolence, compassion, greed, selfishness, and other ethical qualities.

Sociocultural facet – social and familial roles, such as parent, child, citizen, and member of a community.

Axiological facet – the value status of the human being, including perceptions of nobility, virtue, sinfulness, and one's place under Heaven.

Metaphorical facet – symbolic images associated with humans, such as "human as a flower," "human as a shadow," and other figurative representations.

Each facet is enriched with evidence drawn from Chinese proverbs and subjected to scholarly interpretation. As a result, a comprehensive cognitive portrait of the Chinese concept of the human being is constructed.

Bartmiński's method also emphasizes the importance of profiling. Proverbs may be grouped according to thematic profiles; for instance, proverbs describing the "good person" can be analyzed separately from those depicting the "bad person." Each group forms a distinct profile. These profiles are then compared in order to determine which qualities are praised and which are condemned. Such comparison constitutes an essential component of axiological analysis.

In addition, attention is paid to the point of view embedded in proverbs. The question is asked: From whose perspective is the proverb expressed? Some proverbs represent the voice of collective folk wisdom and therefore reflect a communal evaluation, whereas others may express the perspectives of elders, scholars, rulers, or other social groups. This aspect is also included in the analysis because it significantly influences the resulting profile. For example, wisdom sayings originating from imperial decrees may emphasize the profile of the "obedient subject as a good person," while folk proverbs may portray the "corrupt ruler as a bad person." By integrating these different profiles, a more complete picture emerges of what Chinese culture considers a person should be and should not be. Such an approach allows for a deeper understanding of the cultural, moral, and social dimensions of the concept of "human" in Chinese linguoculture.

Conclusion: The findings of the study demonstrate that the concept of "human" in Chinese folk proverbs represents a complex and multilayered linguocultural structure. This concept encompasses not only the human being as a biological entity but also as a bearer of specific moral, social, and spiritual qualities.

The analysis revealed that the concept of 仁 (rén) embodies benevolence, humanity, and compassion; 礼 (lǐ) reflects social order and norms of propriety; 孝 (xiào) represents filial piety, family loyalty, and intergenerational continuity; 面子 (miànzi) denotes an individual's social reputation, dignity, and prestige; 心 (xīn) symbolizes the inner spiritual world and moral essence of a person; while 天 (tiān) expresses the relationship between human beings and fate, supreme justice, and the cosmic order.

The analysis of proverbs further demonstrated that these concepts function in an integrated manner, collectively shaping the ideal model of a person within Chinese linguoculture. According to this model, an ideal individual is portrayed as benevolent, courteous, devoted to parents, mindful of personal reputation, pure-hearted, and respectful of the laws of Heaven.

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Furthermore, the application of frame semantics and cognitive ethnolinguistic methods proved effective in reconstructing the cognitive portrait of the concept of "human" in Chinese folk proverbs. The results contribute to a deeper understanding of the anthropocentric value system embedded in Chinese linguoculture and provide a theoretical foundation for future comparative studies of Chinese and Uzbek paremiological materials.

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