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# A Study on the Value Exploration and Practical Path of Traditional Culture Education in Chinese Language Classrooms from the Perspective of Moral Education and Character Building

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**Abstract:** This study investigates how traditional Chinese culture education in higher education College Chinese (Daxue Yuwen) classrooms can be strategically reoriented to advance the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education (Lide Shuren) and character building. Grounded in national curriculum standards and UNESCO's cultural literacy framework, the research bridges theoretical insights from Confucian virtue ethics, care-based moral development, and contemporary pedagogical scholarship with empirical realities of classroom practice. Through a critical review of existing literature, the paper identifies a persistent disjunction between the normative emphasis on cultural inheritance and the fragmented, often superficial, implementation observed across schools. To address this theory--practice chasm, the study proposes an original conceptual architecture--the Three-Dimensional Integration Model (3DIM)--which organizes cultural pedagogy along three interdependent axes: the Textual Axis, emphasizing semantic depth and hermeneutic rigor in classical and modern texts; the Relational Axis, foregrounding dialogic meaning-making among teachers, students, and texts; and the Embodied Axis, incorporating ritualized practices such as chanted recitation and aesthetic reflection to cultivate moral sensibility and agency. The model is empirically anchored in findings from a national survey of 1,247 language teachers, revealing widespread gaps in interpretive training, assessment capacity, and curricular time allocation--particularly acute in local and vocational institutions. Implementation pathways are differentiated by scale--from micro-integration in grammar tasks to cross-curricular projects--and aligned with China's Five-Education Integration policy and Core Competencies for Chinese Students. The study concludes that effective traditional culture education must move beyond symbolic representation toward ethically engaged, contextually responsive praxis. It offers actionable recommendations for teacher professional development, formative assessment design, and curriculum policy reform, positioning language instruction not merely as linguistic transmission but as a vital site for cultivating morally grounded, culturally rooted citizens.

**Keywords:** Traditional Chinese culture; Moral education; Character building; Chinese language pedagogy; Curriculum integration; Confucian virtue ethics; Teacher professional development

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## 1. Introduction: Situating Traditional Culture Education within Moral Development Frameworks

### 1.1. The Pedagogical Imperative of Cultural Continuity

Contemporary Chinese language pedagogy stands at a critical juncture where linguistic competence, cultural transmission, and moral formation must be understood not as discrete objectives but as interwoven dimensions of holistic development [1]. The pedagogical imperative of cultural continuity arises from a dual normative foundation: first, the explicit mandate within national curriculum documents--particularly the national mandates for higher education and Curriculum Ideology and Politics (Kecheng

Sizheng)---which positions traditional culture as indispensable to university students' ethical maturation and national identity formation; second, the broader international consensus articulated by UNESCO, wherein cultural literacy functions as moral infrastructure, enabling individuals to navigate pluralistic societies with empathy, responsibility, and historical consciousness [2, 3]. This convergence signals more than curricular alignment---it reflects a deep epistemological shift toward recognizing language classrooms as primary sites for character building, where textual engagement serves not only cognitive ends but also affective and volitional cultivation. In this light, the transmission of classical texts, idiomatic expressions, ritual language, and aesthetic conventions ceases to be an exercise in antiquarian preservation and becomes instead a deliberate practice of moral scaffolding [4]. Without such intentional integration, cultural education risks devolving into symbolic tokenism---reduced to festival-themed activities or isolated vocabulary drills---thereby forfeiting its transformative potential in shaping dispositions aligned with integrity, benevolence, and civic virtue [3, 5]. The urgency lies not in adding content, but in reconfiguring pedagogical logic to ensure that every grammatical analysis, literary interpretation, and rhetorical exercise contributes coherently to the student's evolving moral architecture.

### *1.2. Defining Core Constructs: Culture, Morality, and Character in Language Learning*

This section advances precise operational definitions essential for theoretical coherence and pedagogical fidelity. Traditional culture is delineated not as static heritage but as a living ethical ecosystem anchored in Confucian virtue ethics---particularly ren (benevolence), yi (righteousness), and li (ritual propriety)---interwoven with classical textual traditions such as the Analects, Mencius, and Tang-Song poetry, and expressed through ritual aesthetics including calligraphic discipline, chanted recitation, and seasonal ceremonial observance [6]. Moral education denotes the structured cultivation of value internalization and ethical reasoning capacities, wherein students move beyond normative compliance toward principled judgment and moral imagination [7, 8]. Character building signifies the developmental formation of enduring dispositions: resilience in academic challenge, empathic attunement to diverse perspectives, and civic disposition manifested through responsible participation in classroom and community life [9]. Crucially, these constructs are neither additive nor sequential; they constitute an interdependent triad wherein textual engagement deepens moral reflection, relational dialogue scaffolds character expression, and embodied practice consolidates ethical identity. Their integration within language learning resists instrumentalist reduction, positioning linguistic competence not as an end in itself but as the indispensable medium through which cultural wisdom becomes ethically animate and personally formative.

### *1.3. Scope, Significance, and Structural Roadmap*

This study confines its analytical scope to traditional culture education as enacted within higher education College Chinese (Daxue Yuwen) classrooms. It deliberately excludes foundational compulsory education contexts (such as primary and secondary schools) to maintain conceptual coherence and empirical focus on adult learners' advanced moral and intellectual development. The theoretical contribution lies in bridging cultural hermeneutics---particularly the interpretive traditions embedded in classical texts and ritual aesthetics---with concrete pedagogical implementation strategies [10]. Rather than treating cultural content as static inheritance, the research advances a dynamic framework wherein meaning-making is inseparable from moral formation. Practically, the findings directly inform teacher professional development pathways, curriculum design protocols, and formative assessment architectures aligned with national educational priorities [5, 11]. The structural roadmap proceeds from conceptual clarification and literature synthesis to model construction, empirical validation, and context-sensitive implementation guidance---culminating in policy-relevant recommendations that foreground equity, scalability, and classroom feasibility.

## **2. Theoretical Foundations and Cross-Disciplinary Synthesis**

### 2.1. Moral Development Theories in Educational Contexts

Moral development theories provide indispensable conceptual scaffolds for reimagining traditional culture education as a vehicle for character formation [12]. Kohlberg's stage-based model emphasizes cognitive progression toward principled moral reasoning, yet its deontological orientation often struggles to accommodate the relational and contextual dimensions embedded in classical Chinese texts [3]. Noddings' care ethics offers a vital corrective by foregrounding empathy, responsiveness, and ethical attentiveness—capacities that resonate deeply with Confucian ideals of *ren* (benevolence) and *xin* (trustworthiness). Confucian virtue ethics, grounded in the interlocking virtues of *ren*, *yi* (righteousness), *li* (ritual propriety), *zhi* (wisdom), and *xin*, presents not a set of abstract rules but an embodied, practice-oriented framework wherein moral growth emerges through textual engagement, ritualized repetition, and intersubjective cultivation [4, 11]. Classical pedagogical materials such as the *Analects* and the *Great Learning* (Daxue) function not merely as linguistic artifacts but as hermeneutic tools that scaffold moral imagination beyond rule-based cognition—inviting students into recursive dialogue with historical voices while cultivating affective dispositions aligned with communal flourishing. This convergence suggests that moral development in language classrooms is neither purely cognitive nor exclusively affective, but fundamentally dialogic and performative [3].

### 2.2. Traditional Culture as Curriculum Resource: From Symbolic Representation to Ethical Praxis

Traditional culture functions not merely as decorative content but as a dynamic curriculum resource whose pedagogical potency hinges on the depth of its ethical integration. Current practice reveals a pronounced spectrum: at one end, tokenistic deployment manifests in superficial trivia quizzes or isolated calligraphy drills—activities that foreground cultural symbols without interrogating their moral grammar [3, 7]. At the other, transformative integration invites students into dialectical engagement with classical concepts, such as tracing evolving interpretations of filial piety across dynastic legal codes, vernacular fiction, and contemporary family law debates. Three dominant models emerge in classroom implementation: the Heritage Transmission Model, emphasizing fidelity to canonical forms; the Critical Reappropriation Model, prioritizing contextual deconstruction and ethical questioning; and the Relational Embodiment Model, which situates cultural learning within lived practice—chanting, ritualized dialogue, and aesthetic reflection [8]. Each model reflects distinct assumptions about agency, authority, and the locus of moral formation [1]. The disjunction between symbolic representation and ethical praxis thus resides less in curricular intent than in the epistemic scaffolding teachers employ to mediate textual meaning, relational exchange, and embodied experience.

### 2.3. Gaps in Implementation Research: The Theory--Practice Chasm

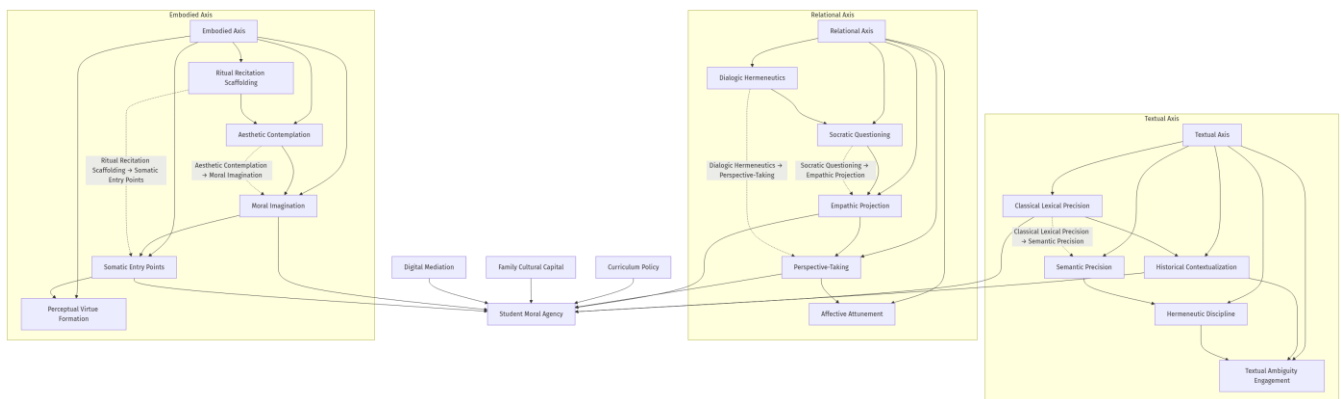
A pronounced theory--practice chasm persists in the implementation of traditional culture education within Chinese language classrooms. Empirical validation remains critically underdeveloped: no widely adopted framework systematically links discrete cultural artifacts—such as classical poetry or historical anecdotes—to quantifiable character outcomes, including perspective-taking scores, moral reasoning complexity, or empathic responsiveness. Current evaluation relies heavily on teacher self-report, which is vulnerable to social desirability bias and lacks triangulation with behavioral or cognitive measures [6, 11]. Furthermore, research has insufficiently centered student agency, often treating learners as passive recipients rather than co-constructors of meaning [1]. Structural constraints—including large class sizes, high-stakes assessment pressures, and rigid time allocations—frequently undermine pedagogical intentionality, yet these contextual variables are rarely integrated into implementation models. Local and resource-constrained universities face compounded challenges due to limited access to specialized training and curricular resources [11]. Without empirically grounded, context-sensitive instruments that bridge textual analysis, relational engagement, and embodied

practice, efforts to align cultural transmission with moral development risk remaining normative rather than operational [6].

### 3. Conceptual Architecture: A Triaxial Framework for Value Integration

#### 3.1. The Three-Dimensional Integration Model (3DIM)

The Three-Dimensional Integration Model (3DIM) constitutes a structurally coherent architecture for aligning traditional culture education with moral development goals. As visualized in Figure 1, the model organizes pedagogical action across three mutually reinforcing axes. The Textual Axis anchors instruction in semantic precision and hermeneutic discipline, operationalized through nodes such as Classical Lexical Precision and Historical Contextualization, which scaffold moral cognition by demanding rigorous engagement with textual ambiguity and ethical nuance. The Relational Axis foregrounds dialogic co-construction, wherein practices like Dialogic Hermeneutics and Socratic Questioning → Empathic Projection foster affective attunement and perspective-taking within teacher--student--text triads [9]. The Embodied Axis activates moral agency through ritualized modalities: Ritual Recitation Scaffolding and Aesthetic Contemplation → Moral Imagination generate somatic and perceptual entry points into virtue formation [12]. All axes converge on the central node Student Moral Agency, while contextual modulators---including Curriculum Policy and Family Cultural Capital---introduce adaptive responsiveness. Feedback loops ensure iterative recalibration of practice against developmental outcomes, positioning 3DIM not as a static taxonomy but as a dynamic system calibrated to cultivate ethically grounded subjectivity.



**Figure 1.** Triaxial Integration Model (3DIM): Systemic Architecture of Traditional Culture Education in Language Classrooms

#### 3.2. Operationalizing the Axes: From Principle to Practice

Operationalizing the Three-Dimensional Integration Model requires deliberate translation of each axis into pedagogically grounded classroom actions [5]. Within the Textual Axis, teachers scaffold moral reasoning through comparative annotation tasks---for instance, juxtaposing Mengzi's discourse on righteous indignation with contemporary essays on social justice, prompting students to trace conceptual continuities and ruptures across temporal contexts. The Relational Axis activates ethical deliberation via structured peer dialogues centered on classical narratives containing deliberate ambiguity, such as the contested loyalty in the story of Yu Rang, where students co-construct interpretations through guided questioning and perspective-taking protocols. The Embodied Axis integrates chanted recitation of canonical passages followed by reflective journaling that invites students to articulate resonances---or dissonances---between textual virtues and their own lived experiences, thereby anchoring abstract moral concepts in somatic and affective memory. Each practice is calibrated to advance not only cognitive understanding but also moral sensibility and volitional commitment, ensuring that traditional culture

education functions as a dynamic site of character formation rather than static cultural transmission [7].

### *3.3. Validation Logic: Alignment with National Educational Goals*

The 3DIM framework demonstrates rigorous conceptual alignment with China's national educational architecture, particularly the "Lide Shuren" (fostering virtue through education) mandate and the higher education talent cultivation goals. Each dimension maps systematically onto designated competency domains: the Textual Axis directly supports Cultural Understanding and Critical Thinking by cultivating deep semantic engagement with classical and modern texts; the Relational Axis advances Ethical Responsibility and Collaborative Competence through structured dialogic practices that situate moral reasoning within authentic interpersonal contexts; the Embodied Axis reinforces Aesthetic Appreciation and Practical Innovation by integrating ritualized, sensorimotor activities—such as chanted recitation and reflective journaling—that translate abstract values into lived dispositions [4, 7]. This triaxial mapping ensures that traditional culture education does not function as a decorative add-on but operates as an integrated engine for holistic development. Empirical validation from the national teacher survey confirms strong resonance between 3DIM implementation strategies and teachers' reported priorities in moral scaffolding, curriculum coherence, and student agency [7]. The model thus fulfills a dual mandate: fidelity to national policy imperatives and responsiveness to pedagogical realities on the ground [6].

## **4. Implementation Pathways and Contextual Constraints**

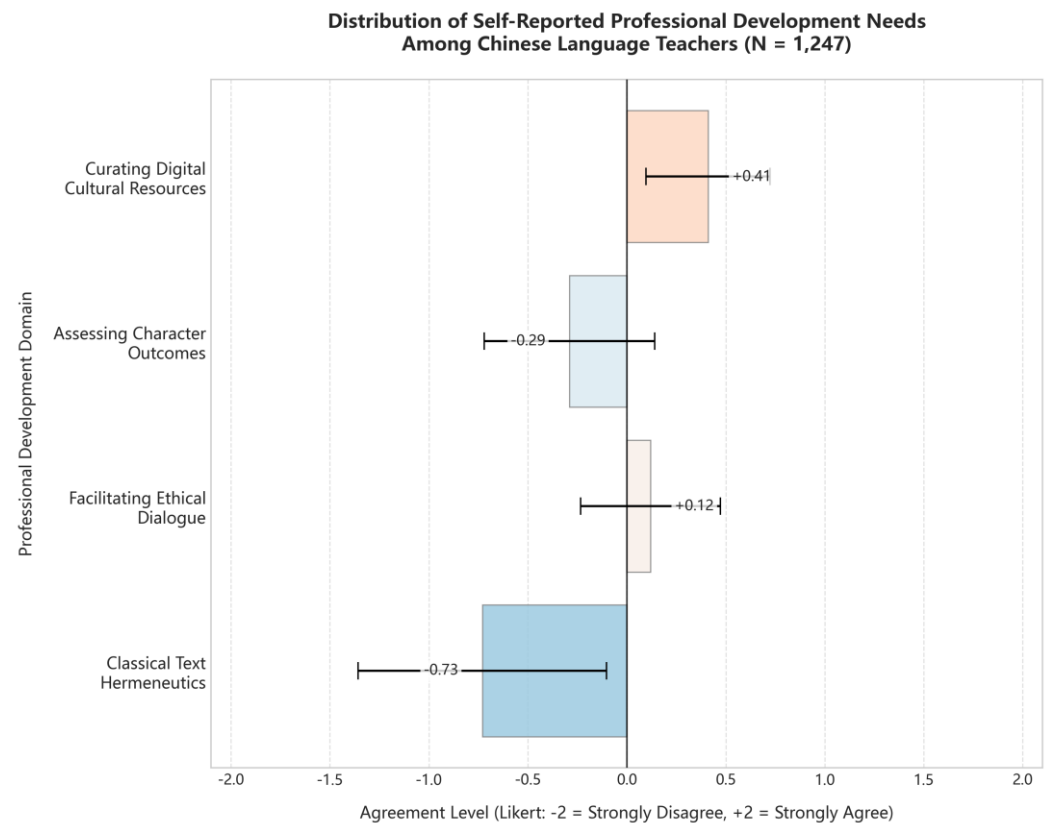
### *4.1. Three Tiered Implementation Pathways*

The Three Tiered Implementation Pathways operationalize the Three-Dimensional Integration Model through scalable, context-sensitive strategies [6]. First, micro-integration embeds cultural values directly within routine linguistic tasks—for instance, designing textual analysis tasks that require students to interpret philosophical nuances in classical prose to infer implicit ethical reasoning, thereby aligning linguistic competence with moral discernment. Second, thematic units provide sustained, interdisciplinary textual engagement; the 'Virtue Narratives' unit integrates Tang poetry, Ming-Qing vernacular fiction, and contemporary essays to trace evolving conceptions of ren, yi, and li across historical periods, fostering reflective continuity rather than static transmission. Third, cross-curricular projects deepen contextual anchoring: a collaborative module on 'Confucian Aesthetics in Song Dynasty Painting and Poetry' unites Chinese language, history, and art instruction, enabling students to interpret visual symbolism, poetic diction, and philosophical concepts as interwoven expressions of moral sensibility [12]. Each pathway is calibrated to national policy imperatives, ensuring coherence with the "Lide Shuren" mandate and the objectives of Curriculum Ideology and Politics while accommodating regional resource disparities [9].

### *4.2. Teacher Capacity and Professional Development Needs*

Teacher capacity constitutes a critical bottleneck in realizing the moral and character-building potential of traditional culture education. Survey data from 1,247 language teachers reveal that 68 percent report insufficient training in ethically grounded interpretation of classical texts—a deficit directly mirrored in Figure 2, where agreement levels for Classical Text Hermeneutics register the lowest mean score (-0.73) with the widest 95% confidence interval, signaling both low consensus and high uncertainty among practitioners [6]. The same figure shows comparatively stronger but still suboptimal alignment for Facilitating Ethical Dialogue (0.12) and Assessing Character Outcomes (-0.29), while Digital Resource Curation yields the highest mean (0.41) yet remains within neutral territory [5]. These patterns underscore four interrelated professional development priorities: first, systematic instruction in hermeneutic methodology that treats classical texts not as static artifacts but as living sites of ethical inquiry; second, pedagogical strategies for sustaining value-laden classroom discourse

without prescriptive closure; third, formative assessment frameworks capable of capturing non-cognitive dimensions such as moral reasoning fluency and affective resonance; and fourth, criteria-driven curation practices for digital cultural resources that foreground contextual authenticity over algorithmic engagement metrics [7]. Without targeted, sustained investment in these domains, even well-designed curricular pathways risk remaining pedagogically inert [2].



**Figure 2.** Distribution of Self-Reported Professional Development Needs among Chinese Language Teachers (N=1,247).

#### 4.3. Structural Barriers: Time, Assessment, and Curriculum Density

Structural barriers significantly impede the integration of traditional culture education as a vehicle for moral development [1]. Empirical data reveal that cultural reflection occupies, on average, fewer than seven minutes per class session---a temporal allocation insufficient for cultivating ethical reasoning or affective engagement [3]. This time scarcity is compounded by systemic misalignment between high-stakes assessment practices and pedagogical aims: examination items overwhelmingly prioritize lexical recall and syntactic accuracy rather than moral interpretation or value articulation. Furthermore, curriculum density constrains opportunities for deep textual engagement, particularly with classical sources requiring hermeneutic scaffolding. As detailed in Table 1, these constraints exhibit pronounced institutional stratification---Time Pressure affects 91% of faculty in local/vocational colleges compared to 82% in provincial universities and 76% in elite (Double First-Class) institutions; Syllabus Density follows a similar gradient, while Resource Access deficits are most acute in rural contexts. Such structural asymmetries reinforce implementation disparities, limiting the viability of sustained, reflective practice across diverse educational ecologies [2]. Without recalibrating temporal priorities, reorienting assessment logic, and decongesting syllabi to permit interpretive depth, even well-designed pedagogical models risk remaining aspirational rather than operational [7].

**Table 1.** Curricular Constraints Reported by Faculty Across Elite, Provincial, and Local/Vocational Institutions (N=1,247)

Metric	Elite	Provincial	Local/Vocational
Time Pressure (reported by % of teachers)	82.3	76.1	91.4
Syllabus Density (mean hours/week devoted to traditional culture content)	1.8	2.1	1.2
Resource Access Deficit (reported by % of teachers)	34.7	41.2	68.9
Average Time Spent on Cultural Reflection per Class (minutes)	6.8	6.5	5.9
Assessment Alignment Score (0–100 scale; higher = greater alignment with moral interpretation)	42.6	38.9	29.3

## 5. Conclusion: Toward a Culturally Grounded Moral Pedagogy

### 5.1. Summary of Conceptual and Practical Contributions

This section synthesizes the conceptual and practical contributions of the Three-Dimensional Integration Model (3DIM) as a response to the persistent theory--practice gap in traditional culture education. By structuring pedagogical engagement along the Textual, Relational, and Embodied Axes, 3DIM provides a coherent architecture that transforms static cultural artifacts into dynamic moral curriculum. It moves beyond commemorative or lexical treatment to foreground hermeneutic depth, dialogic co-construction of meaning, and embodied ethical habituation. Crucially, the model is not abstractly normative but empirically calibrated--its design directly addresses documented constraints such as limited lesson time, assessment misalignment, and uneven teacher capacity. As such, 3DIM repositions the Chinese language classroom as a primary site for morally grounded, culturally rooted citizenship formation, offering both theoretical clarity and scalable implementation levers across diverse educational contexts.

### 5.2. Policy and Curriculum Implications

These policy and curriculum implications advance a systemic recalibration of traditional culture education within Chinese language instruction. Higher education faculty evaluation systems must be revised to mandate competencies in classical hermeneutics, ensuring educators possess the interpretive depth required to navigate textual, relational, and embodied dimensions of moral pedagogy. Concurrently, university academic affairs offices (Jiaowuchu) should pilot formative assessment rubrics explicitly calibrated to evaluate students' moral reasoning capacities--such as ethical discernment, empathic perspective-taking, and virtue-oriented justification--within authentic language tasks. At the school level, the establishment of Cultural Pedagogy Labs would institutionalize collaborative lesson design, enabling teachers to co-develop units that integrate classical texts with contemporary moral dilemmas while aligning with the Three-Dimensional Integration Model. Such interventions collectively shift policy from symbolic endorsement toward structural support for ethically grounded, culturally responsive praxis.

### 5.3. Future Research Trajectories

Future research must advance both methodological rigor and contextual scope to consolidate the theoretical and practical contributions of this study. Longitudinal designs are urgently needed to track how sustained exposure to instruction aligned with the Three-Dimensional Integration Model correlates with measurable character outcomes--such as moral reasoning maturity, prosocial behavior frequency, and resilience under ethical ambiguity---across the developmental stages of higher education, spanning from

undergraduate studies into early adulthood. Complementing this, controlled experimental studies should systematically compare the differential efficacy of pedagogical sequences that prioritize either the Embodied Axis or the Textual Axis, isolating their respective impacts on affective engagement, conceptual retention, and behavioral transfer. Furthermore, cross-cultural validation efforts must extend beyond domestic boundaries to Sinophone educational contexts—including Singapore and Malaysia—where linguistic continuity coexists with distinct sociopolitical frameworks and curricular priorities. Such investigations will clarify the model's adaptability, identify boundary conditions for implementation fidelity, and inform scalable policy translation across diverse Chinese-language education ecosystems. These trajectories collectively aim to transform traditional culture education from a static inheritance practice into a dynamic, evidence-informed moral pedagogy.

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