Article

The New Confucian Entrepreneurs and the Construction of Contemporary Corporate Ethical Culture

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Abstract: Neo-Confucian businessmen are the products of the collision of the times and history, and the neo-Confucian businessmen combine Confucian culture, traditional Confucian business spirit with modern business ethics to form a corporate ethics culture of "governing enterprises with morality", "seeking profit with righteousness", "loving people with benevolence" and "seeking innovation with courage", which puts forward new requirements and development directions for the construction of corporate ethics culture in the new era, which is conducive to promoting the vigorous development of the construction of corporate ethics culture in China.

1. Summary of the Characteristics of New Confucian Businessmen

The term Confucian merchants have a long history, as early as the pre-Qin period there was already a definition of "Confucianism" and "Shang", and with the development of history, the Western Han Dynasty's policy of "emphasizing agriculture and suppressing commerce" made "righteousness not business" become a stereotype among people, in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the continuous invasion of foreign culture, various imported products impacted people's values, the concept of "industry rejuvenating the country" began to be accepted by people, and the long-standing Confucian culture was at this time to form an indissoluble bond with business, and also began the inheritance and development of Confucian merchant culture. This historical evolution highlights how cultural values and economic imperatives co-evolved, shaping a business philosophy that balances moral integrity with commercial success, and providing a foundation for modern neo-Confucian business practices.

Confucian business culture is rooted in the Confucian tradition of "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust" of the "Five Constants", benevolent people love people, people-oriented is the core of Confucianism, but also the core of Confucian business culture, Confucian business culture advocates "reaching the world", "self-want to establish and establish people, self-want and reach people" by oneself to push people, the starting point of thinking about problems and doing things is the world and the people, with grand family and country feelings, and taking "helping the people through the world" as the starting point of the enterprise [1]. In contemporary practice, this philosophy guides decision-making, employee relations, and corporate social responsibility initiatives, ensuring that enterprises pursue growth while maintaining a human-centered, socially responsible orientation.

In terms of the concept of righteousness and profit, Confucianism does not blindly emphasize righteousness and ignore the existence of profit, "wealth and nobility are what people want; If you don't get it in the right way, you won't be able to do it [2]. Poverty and

lowliness are what people hate; If you don't get it in the right way, you won't leave. Confucianism recognizes that everyone has desires, and wealth is not unattainable, but to take it "Unjust and rich and noble, like a floating cloud to me" is this truth, righteousness first and then profit, not seeking ill-gotten wealth, and controlling profit with righteousness. Modern neo-Confucian entrepreneurs balance ethical considerations with market competitiveness, prioritizing sustainable profit generation, ethical sourcing, and transparent financial practices, thereby reinforcing trust among stakeholders and society [3].

Confucianism attaches great importance to etiquette, Confucius has traveled around the world to advocate the restoration of Zhou Li, Confucian tradition of valuing etiquette and revering etiquette, but also inherited by Confucian businessmen, they advocate etiquette, pay attention to treating people with courtesy, follow the culture of etiquette within the enterprise, give full play to the role of etiquette in enterprise management, and establish a good corporate image. In contemporary enterprises, this emphasis on etiquette manifests in professional communication standards, corporate governance norms, and customer engagement strategies, contributing to brand reputation and internal cohesion.

"Wisdom" is embodied in Confucian culture as the middle of the time, that is, you can adapt to the times, move with the times, and make timely choices according to the changes in the internal and external environment. Neo-Confucian businessmen apply this principle by embracing innovation, monitoring market trends, and adjusting business models proactively to remain resilient in dynamic economic conditions [4].

"Confucian businessmen practice 'inner sincerity in the heart, external trust in people', take the word integrity as the foundation of their existence, both internal and external, and use good word-of-mouth to shape their own corporate image. This approach continues to influence corporate ethics, stakeholder engagement, and long-term strategic planning, ensuring that integrity-driven practices foster loyalty and sustainable growth.

Confucian businessmen in the new era conform to the trend of today's economic globalization, combine Confucian culture and traditional Confucian business spirit with modern business ethics culture, and form a new Confucian businessman [5]. The corporate ethics culture of neo-Confucian businessmen includes the following four aspects:

2. Govern Enterprises with Morality

Ancient Chinese philosophy is closely related to the way of governing the country, and there is a similarity between governing enterprises and governing the country. "Rule by virtue" is the core of Confucianism's way of governing the country, and it is also the way of governing enterprises passed down from generation to generation by Confucian businessmen.

"The way is political, the punishment is the same, and the people are shameless; Guiding them with virtue and rectifying them with propriety is both shameful and unrestrained. "The Analects of Confucius, for the Governance", shows that what the people really need is not criminal law, but the use of moral education and etiquette to guide and educate, and Confucianism puts moral education in the first place of governing the country, which is enough to show the great significance of morality in governing the country and enterprises [6].

The new Confucian businessman embeds moral governance in corporate governance, convinces people with virtue, and is no longer a reward and punishment policy for employees and stakeholders, but knows to move with emotion and morality, and puts forward the concept of "three for", for the king, for the relatives, and for the teacher, the leader starts from himself, strictly requires himself to be a virtuous person, at the same time, treat employees as relatives, treat each other with sincerity, and unite employees with their own moral appeal, the most important thing is to set a good example, "learn high as a teacher, be a model" Enterprise leaders should continuously improve their moral and philosophical literacy, penetrate employees in daily details, and achieve the goal of moving morally.

3. Seeking Profit through Righteousness

The ancients said, "A gentleman loves wealth and seeks it in the right way." This is the principle of not taking unjust wealth. Confucian merchants have always emphasized the importance of righteousness in dealing with the relationship between righteousness and profit. "To me, wealth and wealth are like floating clouds, even if it is unjust." - The Analects of Confucius [7].

Contemporary new Confucian merchants not only implement and act on the principle of "righteousness generates profit" in Confucian culture, but also actively respond to the requirements of the times. On this basis, they place greater emphasis on "righteousness" and form the new Confucian merchant's concept of righteousness and profit, which is the idea of commercial altruism [8]. Putting the interests of the country, society, and the people first, actively assuming social responsibility, fulfilling corporate social obligations, and being enthusiastic about public welfare have become the industry standards of the new Confucian merchants. Utilizing Confucian wisdom to create more wealth for society and the country is the pursuit of the new Confucian merchants.

4. Love Others with Benevolence

Under the influence of capitalism, labor relations have always been in an unequal position, placing workers on par with machines, focusing only on their economic value, and ignoring their ethical demands as human beings, which is no longer applicable to today's commercial market. The awakening of workers' consciousness has also improved this stereotype of labor management relations [9].

Confucian culture emphasizes respect for the individual, with phrases such as "respecting the elderly and caring for the elderly, caring for the young and caring for the young" and "loving the people and loving all things". The Confucian concept of benevolence extends not only to individuals but also to all things in heaven and earth. Confucian merchants regard benevolence as the starting point of corporate behavior, based on patriotism, and adhere to the principle of "governing the world and benefiting the people".

Based on Confucian merchants, the new Confucian merchants further developed benevolence and put forward the concept of "family" enterprise, equating enterprise management with family governance. They adopt an attitude and method towards employees and stakeholders towards their families, attach importance to humanistic care for them, think about what employees think, and are anxious about their needs. Employees interact with each other like brothers and sisters, enhancing their sense of identification with the enterprise and stakeholders [10].

5. Seeking Novelty with Courage

The brave are not afraid "comes from the Analects of Confucius, Zihan, which teaches his disciples to bravely practice and move forward without fear of any difficulties. On this basis, Xunzi also proposed the concept of "upward courage", which means that if people all over the world can accept my views, then I will work together to achieve great things. If people all over the world cannot accept my views, then I will stand alone between heaven and earth, facing right and wrong, not agreeing with others due to the situation, but bravely adhering to the justice in my own heart. This is the "great courage" advocated by Confucianism.

Generations of Confucian merchants were not bound by the shackles of the times, but adhered to their original aspirations, faced the storms of the times, and strived to practice the "courage" of Confucianism. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Jin merchants and Huizhou merchants were their representatives. They chose industry to save the country in the tide of the times and devoted generations of effort to it [11].

6. The Connotation of Corporate Ethical Culture

Corporate ethical culture is an important component of corporate culture, which is based on certain philosophical ideas as its theoretical foundation, established by convention, accepted, and put into practice by members and stakeholders of the enterprise. It is the core part of corporate culture and a part of the core competitiveness of the enterprise.

Corporate ethical culture includes two parts, namely internal corporate ethical culture and external corporate ethical culture.

The internal corporate ethical culture mainly involves the code of conduct and moral norms between corporate leaders and employees. This part is usually initiated by leaders during the formation and development of the enterprise, followed by employees, and passed down from generation to generation. It has certain behavioral constraints and moral appeal, and is often proportional to the time of the enterprise's formation. The longer the enterprise is formed, the more mature its internal corporate ethical culture becomes. From the fundamental principle of requiring all members to "jointly abide by" the internal corporate ethical culture, leaders and employees should form a consensus on the internal corporate ethical culture that is conducive to the stable development of the enterprise and society. Therefore, many similarities with social moral standards can be seen in the internal corporate ethical culture.

The external corporate ethical culture is mainly reflected in the behavioral norms and moral standards that companies must abide by when dealing with their own relationship with the external environment. The external corporate ethical culture mainly includes the corporate responsibility that companies should bear to society, the obligation of companies to protect the environment, and the ethical responsibility that companies should bear to social citizens. Finally, it is necessary to handle the relationship between companies well, balance the interests of stakeholders and those who divide the interests, and in the process of handling these relationships, the corporate ethical culture reflected belongs to the external corporate ethical culture.

7. The Corporate Ethical Culture of New Confucian Merchants

The core of the New Confucian Merchant is the organic combination of Confucian thought and modern business ethics, and the resulting product is the corporate ethical culture that adapts to the needs of the times. The spirit of the new Confucian business embodies the specific manifestation of the ethical culture of the enterprise, which is to govern the enterprise with morality, seek benefits with righteousness, love people with benevolence, and seek innovation with courage. It has an important enlightening significance for building the ethical culture of the enterprise.

The corporate ethical culture of the new Confucian merchants can also be divided into two parts, namely internal and external corporate ethical culture.

Internally, the ethical culture of the New Confucian Business requires business managers to set an example, value their own moral cultivation, and regulate their behavior with strict moral requirements. As ethical leaders, the New Confucian Business communicates moral standards through their own practice, establishes corresponding corporate rules and regulations, and clarifies rewards and punishments. Leaders lead by example, which also enhances the moral appeal of these standards, making employees willing to accept their constraints and achieve the goal of governing the enterprise with morality. The emphasis on righteousness over profit is also an important component of the ethical culture of the new Confucian merchants. They prioritize the interests of the country, society, and the people, and do not excessively pursue corporate interests, but rather pursue social welfare. New Confucian businessmen will implement the ethical culture of benevolence in their actions, attach importance to humanistic care for employees and stakeholders, and strive to create a "family-like" organizational management model, thereby enhancing the recognition and cohesion of employees and stakeholders towards the enterprise. The 'great courage' of the new Confucian merchants is also part of their internal

corporate ethical culture. The implementation of 'courage' by the new Confucian merchants enables them to adhere to it in the new era without being complacent, and to utilize current events to achieve their own creative development.

Externally, the corporate ethical culture of the new Confucian merchants is mainly reflected in their active commitment to social responsibility, protection of the social environment, and maintenance of market order. The corporate ethical culture of the new Confucian merchants is first reflected in their commitment to social responsibility. They realize that enterprises are not only economic organizations, but also a part of social organizations, and should actively participate in social welfare activities, giving back to society through charitable donations, volunteer services, educational support, and other means. New Confucian businessmen integrate the Confucian spirit of benevolence into their corporate culture, emphasizing that companies should pay attention to vulnerable groups and promote social fairness and harmony through practical actions. In terms of environmental protection, New Confucian businessmen actively respond to the concept of sustainable development, incorporate ecological civilization construction into their corporate strategy, promote green production and consumption, and reduce damage to the natural environment. They realized that the development of enterprises should not be at the expense of the environment, but should coexist harmoniously with nature and achieve long-term sustainable development. Fair competition is another important aspect of the external corporate ethical culture of New Confucian merchants. They adhere to honest business practices, oppose unfair competition, and win the market by providing high-quality products and services. New Confucian businessmen believe that fair competition is not only a fundamental principle of a market economy but also an important guarantee for the long-term development of enterprises.

8. The Enlightenment of New Confucian Businessmen on the Construction of Contemporary Corporate Ethical Culture

In terms of the construction of internal corporate ethical culture, contemporary entrepreneurs should pay attention to the cultivation and improvement of personal morality, learn and draw on traditional Chinese philosophy, integrate the way of governing the country with the way of governing the enterprise, and seek answers from history. Gradually implementing personal moral standards into enterprise management, individuals strictly abide by them while paying attention to moral persuasion and influence on employees, emphasizing the consistency between personal moral thinking and practical behavior, integrating knowledge with action, and emphasizing humanistic care for employees and stakeholders to enhance the sense of identity of the enterprise's ethical culture.

In terms of the construction of external corporate ethical culture, contemporary entrepreneurs should actively assume social responsibility, pay attention to the protection of the ecological environment, abide by market competition order, engage in fair competition, establish a good corporate competition atmosphere, and cooperate for win-win results. Comply with laws and regulations, operate in accordance with the law, and do not act without authorization, and bear the responsibility of the law. Treat people with sincerity, prioritize consumers, protect their rights and interests, and provide the highest quality services to the country, society, and people.

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