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DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF CHINESE CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE FOR ECONOMIC INNOVATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Chinese excellence traditional culture continues to prosper in the times of rapid economic development in recent years. The Chinese culture has been catching up with the Western culture in popularity. Chinese government has always advocated the importance of Chinese culture and advised the Chinese to learn the excellent culture. It is believed that the Chinese culture excellence can bring great economic development and innovations to China. However, there is still a lacking of conceptual understanding of the Chinese culture of excellence and its impact on economic innovations. This paper intends to address that problem. Using the case of universities and colleges in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, this paper explores the relationship between Chinese excellent culture and economic innovation. A theoretical framework on how Chinese excellent culture leads to economic innovation is constructed and presented. With the construction of theoretical framework of the Chinese culture, there is a better understanding of how Chinese excellence culture can lead to economic innovation. The understanding is useful for policy makers especially at the universities level to encourage culture excellence training and learning that will lead to economic innovation in the long run.

1. Introduction

China is a country that has more than 5000 years of history. China has rich culture such as those related to Confucius values. Confucius values are important to human development. The good moral values from Confucius such as filial piety, willingness to learn, perseverance, strong belief can shape a person to be more discipline and contribute to economic development of a nation (Fan, 2021). In recent years, China has grown from a poor developing country to the second largest economy in the world. Culture of excellence is imperative in higher education (e.g., Nasriman et al., 2021; Voon, 2009) and there are always lessons to be learned from different national and ethnic cultures, especially from the higher performing country, China. The culture of China has become increasingly popular and influential in the global arena. Many foreign scholars came to China to learn about the Chinese culture.

Universities and colleges in China play an important role in promoting Chinese culture and values to the graduates and nurture them to be successful in innovating products (Fan, 2021). Universities and colleges have a social function to promote traditional culture especially Confucius culture. Some young graduates think that the Western culture is associated with technological advancement. They think that the Western culture is better than Chinese culture in promoting technological innovation. Thus, some Chinese abandon the important values of Chinese culture and adopt Western culture. This shows that there is lack of understanding of Chinese culture excellence that can bring economic innovations to the country. Chinese culture can bring economic development to China. This has been shown by China's economic growth for the past 40 years. However, the education sector in China does not emphasize too much on the teaching of Chinese culture but more emphasis on technological development. There are some good Chinese excellence cultural values such as perseverance, willingness to learn, willingness to innovate, willingness to try, diligence and discipline (e.g., Voon, 2009) which are central to the economic innovations and development. Moreover, students in Chinese universities also put less focus in participating actively in the Chinese cultural value training courses as the students think that technological development and innovations is crucial to the country's economic progress (e.g., Nguyen et al., 2017).

This paper intends to develop a theoretical framework that explains the relationship between the Chinese culture of excellence and economic innovations. Chinese cultural excellence is the adoption of Chinese cultures inherited from Confucius in Analects (Confucius, 2016), Mencius and Zhouyi that enable China to develop socially and economically. Economic innovation refers to the innovated products produced by prolific academicians, students and entrepreneurs in China. Economic innovations depend on the cultivation of talents, which is a process. It takes time to change economic development by relying on the implantation of cultural ideas. Historical development has fully shown that this problem will inevitably be solved. Therefore, now China constantly emphasizes cultural excellence and confidence which have helped in the socio-economic development. The relationship between culture and economy seems very simple, but the in-depth analysis can be very complicated, because both economic development and cultural continuation are a long processes, and Ningxia's economic innovations are in line with China's overall economic development trend. Major economic indicators are in line with expectations, the economic structure has been adjusted and optimized, the quality of operations has been continuously improved, the overall trend has been positive, and positive progress has been made in high-quality development (Wang, 2021). The paper is divided into six sections namely introduction, cultural excellence in China and the role of universities and colleges in promoting culture of excellence in China, a brief introduction to Ningxia higher learning institutions, methodology, discussion, and conclusion.

2. Cultural Excellence in China

Excellent performance is commonly emphasized for better quality of life in China. Chinese culture has always been characterized by the contention of a hundred schools of thought and the flowering of a hundred flowers. Although China has other cultural values, the main one that influences the Chinese culture is Confucianism. Confucius was a teacher and philosopher of the ancient China. He was born as Kongqiu in 551 B.C. (2,572 years ago) near Qufu, in eastern China. He liked learning and studied music, history and mathematics. His famous book that shapes the values of the Chinese was called *Analects*, in which he stressed the cultivation of personal qualities such as benevolence, reciprocity and filial piety. He emphasized that a person should cultivate disciplines and moral authority in himself and willing to serve the community and nation. He also espoused the concept of life-long learning and self-improvement to contribute to the advancement of the nation. These personal qualities later became the cultural excellence traits and were adopted in China. By dividing the dimensions of Chinese culture of excellence, people can more clearly understand the meaning of excellence. People can use the talents and attitudes with innovative ideas to supplement the strengths and capability for the economic development of Ningxia. The list of cultural excellence traits or dimensions are shown in Table 1.

2.1 Role of universities and colleges in promoting cultural excellence in China

There are 2,688 universities and public colleges in China (Textor, 2020). Local colleges and universities have obligations and responsibilities to promote knowledge advancement and cultural excellence to the people through education. Chinese universities and families believe that culture is important in shaping people's mind and instill good discipline inside a person in order for the person to contribute to the development of a nation.

Students in China largely grow up in a culture rich of Confucius values. As a master of Confucianism, Confucius took "benevolence" as the core of his thought, and put "filial piety" in an extremely important position, and put forward the view that "filial piety is the root of benevolence"(Fan, 2021). Confucius' filial piety view includes raising relatives, respecting relatives, remonstrate with relatives, and three years of bereavement, forming a relatively mature system (Fan, 2021). The core values of Confucius are to educate a person to love others, respect the parents and take care of their parents. Universities and colleges in China also promote the teaching of Confucius values. There are Confucius classes organized in universities in China. In order to better promote local traditional culture, local colleges and universities focus on strengthening cultural construction, increase cultural awareness, enhance cultural self-confidence and achieve cultural self-reliance among students. Many efforts have been done to promote Confucius culture in local universities and colleges. These include creating a conducive environment in the universities' campus for the learning and teaching for the Confucius values, incorporating the Confucius lessons in syllabus, cultural dissemination by lecturers in classroom and the implementation of cultural activities in students' extracurricular activities. Gan (2018) showed that students in China felt that learning traditional culture and incorporating traditional culture into the syllabus can bring better understanding of students towards culture of China. As a result of that, the students can appreciate Chinese culture and are more willing to contribute to the development of China.

Although traditional culture is believed to be important and can bring development to the nation, there are still some difficulties in the teaching and learning traditional culture in universities and colleges in China. Yu (2017) found out that some lecturers colleges and universities in China

are lacking the professionalism in disseminating the good values of culture to students. Xu (2019) also showed that some curriculum design fails to incorporate the traditional culture and there is lack of understanding of Chinese students towards the culture of excellence.

3. Higher learning institutions in Ningxia Autonomous Region

Ningxia is a landlocked autonomous region in the northwest of China. Ningxia is one of the five autonomous regions in China. The other four are Inner Mongolia autonomous Region, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Tibet Autonomous Region and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The region has 5 prefectures, 21 counties and 219 townships. It has four airports in the region. There is 7.2 million people living in Ningxia.

There are a total of 19 colleges and universities in Ningxia, among which 8 are undergraduate colleges, and the remaining 12 are higher vocational colleges. There are nine major universities and colleges in Ningxia Autonomous Region. The eight universities are North Minzu University, Ningxia University, Ningxia Medical University, Ningxia Normal University, Ningxia Institute of Science and Technology, Xinhua College, Yinchuan Energy Institute and Yinchuan College and Ningxia Polytechnic. Chinese government has never neglected the funding to these Ningxia autonomous region. To accelerate the process of high-quality economic development in Ningxia and narrow the difference between high-quality development levels among regions. There are initiatives adhering to problem-oriented approach, focusing on weak links, taking multiple and comprehensive measures, and striving to achieve stable, healthy and sustainable linkage economic development of the whole region (Wen, 2021). The development strategy has the objective to modernize the development of Ningxia region. Investment in education, science and technology, talent training, and environmental projects in the western region is strategically promoted, allowing a high-salary system higher than the level of the Special Zone, and higher job allowances for science and technology experts, educational experts and management experts who participate in development and construction in the western region (Niu, 2004). Many talents have been trained in the field of ethnic culture, such as the study of Hui culture.

Ningxia recently has been developed into economic power with the advancement of science and technology. The Science and Technology Department of Ningxia (STDN) is given the task to develop the science and technology in Ningxia region. Science and technological innovation is crucial to the Ningxia industries development. The industries in Ningxia are dominated by the highly polluting heavy industries, manufacturing and associated logistics activities (Asian Development Bank, 2021). The government is concerned about the negative impact of pollution brought to the people and therefore promote the economic transformation and emphasize on low carbon industries in its 14th Five Year Plan from 2021 to 2025. The economic innovations of the higher learning institutions (e.g., technical and vocational schools) are also emphasized for better human capital development. The people with the right attitudes and excellence orientation will be essential to improve and sustain the institutional performance.

4. The Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is developed to explain the relationship between Chinese culture of excellence and the economic innovations. Figure 1 shows the dimensions of Chinese culture of excellence and their influences on the economic innovations.

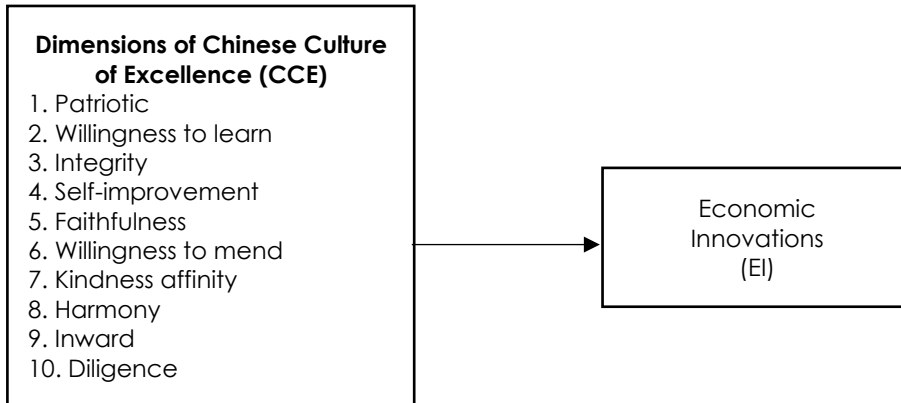


Figure 1: Relationship between the Chinese Culture of Excellence and Economic Innovations

The framework shows the cultural traits that would lead to economic innovations (e.g. new courses and services, product innovations) in the universities and colleges. The Confucious' cultural traits include discipline, willingness to learn, perseverance, willing to invest time and energy, willing to struggle and take long haul, willing to be entrepreneurs and willing to innovate. These cultural traits are adapted from Confucian values included in the Analects. These cultural traits can lead to innovation of products and services with economic values in the universities and colleges.

The core strength in the universities and colleges includes the knowledge advancement and product innovations. The economic innovations can bring about strategic educational as well as socio-economic development. The innovations are most probably created by enterprising individuals or entrepreneurs (e.g., Schumpeter, 1949). The framework developed in Figure 1 is used to have a better understanding of how the cultural traits can lead to product innovation. If a person possesses the cultural traits, he or she is willing to innovate products and become an entrepreneur. For example, if a person is discipline and willing to spend his time and energy to innovate, he or she can innovate products and services for the universities. There are other cultural traits that need to be possessed to be an innovator, such as willingness to learn and perseverance. The cultivation of these cultural traits and personalities is essential to the formation of well-educated individuals that could benefit the society and nation through product innovations. The innovated products can bring development to a nation by being commercialized. This framework can be examined empirically in the case of Ningxia Autonomous Region later. Because economic innovation has different problems for everywhere, the main problems faced by Ningxia are the level of local economic development and education development level, so the challenge facing institutions of higher learning is the investment of education and talent training.

The framework of this study is mainly based on the existing literature and the actual research resources. With the rapid development of China's economy and the diversified demand for talents, higher education consistently pays great attention to the connotation development, which also puts forward the transformation and innovations for talent training. By updating the goal of talent training and innovating the talent training mode, a large number of professional and technical talents are cultivated (Shen, 2021). What needs to be explained here is the relationship between Chinese culture of excellence (CCE) and economic innovation (EI).

5. Methodology

The dimensions for Chinese culture of excellence presented and discussed in this paper were obtained from the selected literature (e.g., Analects of Confucius, Mencius, Zhouyi). These dimensions and items will be analyzed and verified quantitatively with the relevant reliability and validity analysis techniques (e.g., internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha coefficients and correlations, exploratory factor analysis) based on the empirical data collected using structured questionnaires. The personally administered survey method will be employed if the situation (i.e., COVID-19) permits, or it will be using online questionnaire survey. The lecturers and students in the higher learning institutions in Ningxia will be selected for the interviews. Samples will be selected from the Ningxia universities population. The lecturers and students will be given the carefully designed questionnaires that contain the various dimensions of Chinese cultural of excellence and the multi-items economic innovation constructs (objective and perception measures). The economic innovation is measured by the number of new products produced in a year and the perceptions of innovativeness with economic values.

5.1 Dimensions of Chinese Culture of Excellence

Table 1 shows the dimensions of Chinese Culture of Excellence based on the related major literature (e.g., Analects of Confucius, Mencius, Zhouyi). There are 10 dimensions and each of them contains a few items. The dimensions are discussed as follows:

1. Patriotic: It refers to people's love for the country. During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods in China wars between countries occurred frequently, so people's feelings for the country are above all else. Of course, only when the country is strong and people's life is stable will there be more economic innovations. These can be implemented by the IPE.

2. Willingness learn: China has a very long history. People have never stopped learning knowledge. Since ancient times, they have emphasized the importance of learning. Continuous learning can change their destiny. When people can love learning, their ideological understanding will be improved and new things will be born, so as to promote social progress and economic development.

3. Integrity: This is a sentence about human nature. It tells people to have lofty thoughts and noble morality and to become a complete person. The integrity of human nature is of great significance to and social stability.

4. Self-improvement: In China's history and culture, there is no perfect education system. These words are usually used to encourage people to learn by themselves, including many learning methods in order to constantly improve themselves. Only those who know how to continuously strengthen self-learning will make contributions in many fields.

5. Faithfulness: integrity is the essence of China's excellence culture. Here, it means being honest with each other and keeping promises. Especially in the business model, mutual trust between people is the decisive factor to promote economic innovations and development. It can be promoted and implemented by the institutions.

6. Willingness to mend: here it means that people should learn to change themselves, because no one is perfect, so when people find themselves imperfect, they should change themselves. We often say that innovation is to experience countless failures. When we can constantly improve, we will be able to produce new things. It can be implemented by the TI.

7. Kindness affinity: It means that people should have simple and honest character, treat others kindly, and help each other. The effect of solidarity and mutual assistance is very obvious, especially in the field of information. When we can obtain various information, it will inevitably bring economic innovation.

Table 1

The Dimensions of Chinese Culture of Excellence

| CCE Dimensions | Items | Source |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Patriotic | 1.1 Repair yourself to respect, to secure the people, to secure the community. (修己以敬, 修己以安人, 修己以安百姓。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 1.2 Pursue the interests of the country, do not seek wealth. (苟利国家, 不求富贵。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 1.3 Living is tireless, acting is loyal. (居之无倦, 行之以忠。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 1.4 The three forces can win the handsome, the man cannot win the ambition. (三军可夺帅也, 匹夫不可夺志也) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 1.5 Take the country to the country. (执干戈以卫社稷。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 1.6 The nearest people said, the distant people come. (近者说, 远者来。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 1.7 Everyone is responsible for the rise and fall of the world. (天下兴亡, 匹夫有责。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| 2. Willingness to learn | 2.1 A scholar should not fail to be resolute. He has a heavy and long way to go. (士不可以不弘毅, 任重而道远。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 2.2 If you can't learn, still afraid of loss. (学如不及, 犹恐失之。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 2.3 Virtue never dwells alone; it always has neighbors. (德不孤, 必有邻。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 2.4 See the wise and think how, see no good and introspection. (见贤思齐焉, 见不贤而内自省也。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 2.5 Gain new insights through reviewing old materials, and you can become a teacher. (温故而知新, 可以为师矣。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 2.6 Is it not a pleasure to learn and to review or practice from time to time what has been learned? (学而时习之, 不亦说乎?) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| 3. Integrity | 3.1 Benevolitarian can be good and wicked. (唯仁者能好人, 能恶人。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 3.2 The age of cold, and then know pine and cypress after wither also. (岁寒, 然后知松柏之后凋也。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 3.3 A man of high ideals has no virtue to survive, but to kill himself to become a virtue. (志士仁人, 无求生以害仁, 有杀身以成仁。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 3.4 Wealth and rank cannot corrupt, poverty and base cannot be removed, and power and force cannot be subverted. (富贵不能淫, 贫贱不能移, 威武不能屈。) | Mencius 《孟子》 |
| | 3.5 People do not know but not unhappy, not a gentleman? (人不知而不愠, 不亦君子乎?) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 3.6 Better a broken house than a whole house. (宁可玉碎, 不能瓦全。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| 4. Self-improvement | 4.1 Old Ji Fuzheng, aiming for thousand miles. Martyrs old age, ambitious. (老骥伏枥, 志在千里。烈士暮年, 壮心不已。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 4.2 He who wins is strong and he who wins is strong. (胜人者有力, 自胜者强。) | Lao Tzu 《老子》 |
| | 4.3 Do not complain, do not blame others. (不怨天, 不尤人。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 4.4 Do not know, do not know people. (不患人之不己知, 患不知人也。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 4.5 To cultivate one's morality and self-improvement, then the name with Yao Yu. (以修身自强, 则名配尧禹。) | Xun Zi 《荀子》 |

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| | 4.6 Life as a hero, death is also a male ghost. (生当作人杰, 死亦为鬼雄。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 4.7 Take one step further, continue to improve. (百尺竿头, 更进一步。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| 5. Faithfulness | 5.1 The human life is also straight, ignore the life is also spared. (人之生也直, 罔之生也幸而免。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 5.2 A man without a letter does not know what he can do. (人而无信, 不知其可也。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 5.3 Keep your word and do what you say. (言必信, 行必果。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 5.4 The letter is close to meaning, but it can return. (信近于义, 言可复也。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| 6. Willingness to mend | 6.1 Seeing good is to move, and having had it is to change. (见善则迁, 有过则改。) | Zhouyi 《周易》 |
| | 6.2 A gentleman is slow to speak and sensitive to act. (君子欲讷于言而敏于行。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 6.3 Past without change is past. (过而不改, 是谓过矣。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 6.4 Do not practice traces, also do not go into the room. (不践迹, 亦不入于室。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 6.5 He who speaks is innocent. (言者无罪, 闻者足戒。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| 7. Kindness Affinity | 7.1 Those who love their loved ones dare not be evil to others. Respect, dare not be slower than others. (爱亲者, 不敢恶于人。敬亲者, 不敢慢于人。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 7.2 The mean is virtue, it comes! (中庸之为德也, 其至矣乎!) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 7.3 Brothers in peace, friends in faith. (兄弟敦和睦, 朋友笃诚信。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 7.4 Advice is good. If you can't do it, stop. Do not humiliate yourself. (忠告而善道之, 不可则止, 毋自辱焉。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 7.5 The gentleman reaches, the villain issued. (君子上达, 小人下达。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 7.6 Parents are around, do not travel far away, must travel well. (父母在, 不远游, 游必有方。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| 8. Harmony | 8.1 When two men are of one heart, no iron bolts can keep them apart. (二人同心, 其利断金。) | Zhouyi 《周易》 |
| | 8.2 If a man has shame, he can do nothing. (人有耻, 则能有所不为。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 8.3 A gentleman is a man of harmony but different, while a mean man is a man of discord. (君子和而不同, 小人同而不和。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 8.4 A gentleman does good to others, but not evil to others. (君子成人之美, 不成人之恶。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 8.6 People will bully themselves, and then people will bully them. (人必自侮, 然后人侮之。) | Mencius 《孟子》 |
| 9. Inward | 9.1 A man without foresight must have immediate worries. (人无远虑, 必有近忧。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 9.2 Not angry, not sentimental. (不愤不启, 不悱不发。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 9.3 Levees of thousands of feet burst with mole holes. (千丈之堤, 以蝼蚁之穴溃。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |

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| | 9.4 Be prepared in times of peace. (居安思危, 思则有备, 有备无患。) | Zuo Zhuan 《左传》 |
| | 9.5 Proud cannot grow long, desire cannot longitudinal, ambition is not full, joy is not extreme. (傲不可长, 欲不可纵, 志不可满, 乐不可极。) | Book of Rites 《礼记》 |
| 10. Diligence | 10.1 Good work can prosper a nation, leisure can die. (优劳可以兴国, 逸豫可以亡身。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 10.2 It is easy to go from thrift to extravagance, but difficult to go from extravagance to thrift. (由俭入奢易, 由奢入俭难。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 10.3 Take the degree, use the section, is often enough. (取之有度, 用之有节, 则常足。) | The Mirror of Wisdom 《资治通鉴》 |
| | 10.4 Only frugality helps cleanness, and only forgiveness leads to virtue. (惟俭可以助廉, 惟恕可以成德。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |
| | 10.5 A porridge and a meal, when thinking is not easy. Half silk and half wisp, constant reading material strength is difficult. (一粥一饭, 当思来处不易。半丝半缕, 恒念物力维艰。) | Analects of Confucius 《论语》 |

8. Harmony: It means that people and countries should help each other and establish good relations, which is the most valuable. At the same time, it also shows that only in a peaceful and stable environment, then it will be able to do a good job in innovations for good economic values for all participating stakeholders. It can be implemented by the TI.

9. Inward: It means that people should always reflect on themselves and explore their inner thoughts, so as to have a deeper understanding of themselves. Self-reflection is a kind of progress conducive for innovations and inventions. When people's ideological progress, it will inevitably bring economic innovations.

10. Diligence: It means that Chinese culture of excellence encourages people to love labor, cherish labor achievements and oppose any form of extravagance and negative attitudes and behaviours. People can accumulate experience and practices. With the continuous enrichment of experience, it will certainly bring new things, ideas that will drive innovations which bring economic benefits and growth.

6. Conclusion

Product and service innovations in the universities and colleges are crucial to the socio-economic development of China. These institutions of higher learning play an important role in advancing scientific and technological innovations and nurture entrepreneurs to drive China towards achieving greater economic development. These economic innovations are necessary. Students in the colleges and universities must be trained with excellent cultural traits (e.g. such as Confucius values) to be well-educated and conscientious individuals that contribute to nation building. These values are crucial to strengthen a person's belief and train the students to be more discipline in innovating products which can contribute to economic development. The theoretical framework developed in this paper can help to create a better understanding about the Chinese culture of excellence dimensions and the relevant traits needed to encourage product and service innovations in universities and college level in China. The theoretical framework will be tested and examined in the case of Ningxia Autonomous Region which is rich in cultural diversity and suitable for the empirical exploration of the Chinese culture of excellence.

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