



Original Research

Linguo-cultural value of 忍 'patience' in traditional and modern Chinese culture

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The article outlines a gap in the comprehensive study of values and evaluation processes in human consciousness, emphasising how these processes are aligned with linguo-cultural concepts. The research aims to investigate the evolving cultural value of 忍 (rěn) 'patience' in Chinese culture, highlighting the significance of understanding these transformations in the context of axiological linguistics. A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the cultural and linguistic significance of 忍 (rěn) in Chinese culture was employed. Lexicographical, contextual, and semantic analyses, along with cultural commentary, were applied to describe the multifaceted meanings of 忍 (rěn). The study also used a two-part experimental approach: first, a survey collected diverse Chinese perceptions of 忍 (rěn) through adjectives/nouns, and then an evaluative experiment with bipolar semantic scales measured attitudes towards patience along various dimensions. The findings point out shifts in the modern interpretation of 忍 (rěn) within Chinese culture. While traditional values emphasise endurance and resilience, contemporary perspectives acknowledge the complexity of patience, recognising its strategic, interpersonal, and ethical dimensions. The concept of patience is evolving to encompass adaptability, compromise, and long-term vision, reflecting changing societal values and the influence of globalisation. Despite these shifts, the significance of 忍 (rěn) in fostering personal growth, social harmony, and ethical conduct remains central to contemporary Chinese values and societal norms. The results contribute to a deeper understanding of the transformation of cultural values within society, illustrating how linguistic methods can be employed to study their evolving nature.

KEYWORDS: linguo-cultural value, linguo-cultural concept, evaluation, evaluative relationships, 忍 (rěn), Chinese culture, Chinese, semantic scaling, axiological linguistics, patience



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1. INTRODUCTION

In human activities, individuals rely on their established goals, projects, ideals, norms, and other attitudes. These standards are developed in human consciousness through both explicit and implicit evaluations. Evaluation serves the purpose of aligning objects with the concepts present in human consciousness. Hence, it's inferred that value isn't merely an inherent property of an object; rather, it represents the relationship between the individual (subject) and a specific object (thing or event) (Apresyan, 1995, p. 37; Malyuga, 2013), indicating that

value reflects the connection between thought and reality. The basis for evaluative relationships lies in an assertion acknowledged as a standard or norm, with deviations expressed through terms like *good* or *bad*. Additionally, considering value as a characteristic is intriguing: when focusing on evaluation, the speaker abstracts from the underlying thought, thereby attributing value to the object. Simultaneously, value is also intrinsic to the objects themselves, aligning with various goals, intentions, and norms. However, this aspect of the 'value' concept is often overlooked. Whenever an individual begins comparing an object with a

thought in search of alignment, a value relationship inevitably emerges (Arutyunova, 1988; Malyuga, 2014; Dzyubenko & Borisenko, 2020). This recognition is rare and seldom finds explicit expression.

The study of values and how we judge things is crucial to understanding both personal and group behaviour (Zinchenko, 2011; Malyuga et al., 2016), but it has not received as much attention as it deserves. There is a growing need for linguistics studying social issues to dig into how societal values are changing. We are in a time of major global shifts, driven by digital technology and social media. These forces are changing the way economies and politics work and are deeply affecting how people think and feel, both as individuals and as a group.

Arutyunova (1985) and Wolff (1985) were among the first researchers to explore the axiological aspects of language. Their studies investigate the nature of evaluation, various forms of evaluative meanings, and methods of implementation. They also view evaluation as a distinct linguistic category. Arutyunova (1985) addresses a key concern in axiology – the precedence of absolute versus comparative evaluations, while Wolff (1985) focuses on the semantics of evaluation to specify features like modality and subjectivity. Other scholars made attempts to categorise evaluative vocabulary (Galkina-Fedoruk, 1958; Shakhovskiy, 1987; Serebrennikova, 2011; Sinyachkin, 2011; Akopova, 2016; Akopova, 2023).

However, a universally accepted classification remains elusive, with variations depending on the researchers' fields of expertise. Karasik (2002) views axiological linguistics as an autonomous linguistic field that exists as part of the linguo-cultural approach. The scholar defines axiological linguistics as an interdisciplinary field that explores how values manifest in linguistic consciousness and communicative behaviour. According to Karasik (2002), there exists a specific type of worldview – a value worldview which complements the language worldview, with value dominants shaping cultural meanings and influencing the types of cultures reflected and preserved in language. Thus, it can be assumed that axiological linguistics underscores the culturally contingent nature of all values. Each culture, as a distinct social entity shaped by its historical context, exhibits a particular set (or system) and hierarchy of values that play an integrative role within the community. Consequently, the value system constitutes the nucleus of culture (Babayants, 2013, p. 34-35).

According to Krasnykh (2011), the fundamental values of any culture are resistant to change, despite evidence of their inadequacy or the presentation of more appealing alternatives. Modifications to these fundamental values occur gradually, even under concerted and forceful influence, and they vanish alongside the culture itself. The examination of ongoing shifts in the values of a specific culture holds significance, as it might be able to predict societal changes. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to reveal and examine the shift that is taking place in the Chinese culture along one of the major cultural values – patience.

In the Chinese culture, certain symbols and concepts carry profound significance, encapsulating centuries of tradition, wisdom and values (Bie & Gryaznova, 2021; Leontovich et al., 2023; Speshnev, 2012; Ye & Deng, 2020). Among these is the character 忍 (*rěn*), which embodies a concept deeply ingrained in Chinese culture (Chen, 2022; Kandlintsev, 2022; Yu & Lu, 2000). Often translated as 'patience', 'endurance', or 'perseverance', *rěn* represents far more than mere resilience in the face of adversity. It encompasses a complex interconnection of virtues, philosophical insights, and practical wisdom, shaping not only individual behaviour but also societal norms and collective values.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The methods for the study were chosen to meet its specific goals. To examine the cultural and linguistic value of the concept of patience in traditional Chinese culture, a lexicographical analysis was conducted using relevant dictionaries (Scarborough, 1875; Gotlib & Mu, 2019; Xiaowudian, 2020; Online Idiom Collection, 2024; BKRS, 2024; Bao, 1998; Xu, 2000; Gu, 2009; CCD, 2002; CCD, 2016). Additionally, a set of methods was employed, including descriptive analysis (observation, generalisation, and interpretation of linguistic data), contextual analysis, semantic analysis of definitions, cultural commentary, and linguistic-axiological analysis.

To trace the linguo-cultural value of patience in modern Chinese culture, an experimental semantic scaling method was used. In the first stage of the experiment, respondents were asked to describe the concept of *rěn* using adjectives/nouns and to list their first five associations with the word. The participants were Chinese speakers aged between 18 to 43 years. In total, 20 surveys were collected. The results are presented in Table 1.

To develop the scales, it was necessary to group synonyms and characteristics with similar meanings. Since the work with bipolar scales was planned, it was necessary to select antonyms for the selected nominations. Antonym dictionaries (Bao, 1998; Xu, 2000) were used to select antonyms. The resulting scales are presented in Table 2.

In the second stage, an evaluation experiment was conducted using 16 scales relevant to Chinese perceptions of *rěn*. These scales ranged from -3 to +3, with one antonym of the scale names receiving a score of -3 and the other – a score of +3. Participants were asked to rate how much each characteristic, named on the scale, applied to the concept of *rěn*. In total, 34 Chinese-speaking participants – students and post-graduate students – evaluated *rěn* using these scales. The results and limitations will be discussed in Section 3.2.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Patience in traditional Chinese culture

Patience is universally recognised as a virtue deeply rooted in Chinese culture. The corresponding hieroglyph 忍 (*rěn*) is a symbol that signifies the concept of patience or endurance. It is formed by two characters: 刃 (*rèn* 'blade of the knife') + 心 (*xin* 'heart') = 忍 (*rěn* 'patience'). This symbol, combining the image of

Table 1
Characteristics of the concept 'rěn'

CHARACTERISTIC	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
忍耐 <i>patient</i>	5
冷静的 <i>calm</i>	2
宽容的 <i>tolerant</i>	4
宽容的 <i>restrained, composed</i>	3
坚强 <i>unwavering</i>	2
宽恕的 <i>gentle, indulgent, magnanimous, forgiving</i>	2
痛苦的 <i>painful, suffering</i> 难受的 <i>intolerable</i>	4
坚韧 <i>tough, durable, resilient</i>	3
隐忍 <i>concealing one's mood, thoughts</i>	3
妥协的 <i>compromising</i> 忍让的 <i>yielding</i>	2
屈辱的 <i>humiliating</i> 忍辱负重的 <i>enduring humiliatio</i> 屈辱的 <i>disgraced, humiliating, disgraceful</i>	4
忍气吞声的 <i>suppressing anger</i>	2
卧薪尝胆 <i>lit. sleeping on straw and tasting bile (referring to the story of Yue's Prince Gou Jian who slept on straw and licked bile before meals to remember revenge on the state of Wu that defeated him) Inciting vengeance within oneself; preparing for revenge</i> 愤怒 <i>angry, wrathful</i>	2
谦逊的 <i>humble</i> 坏 <i>bad</i> 无意义的 <i>meaningless</i> 不必要 <i>unnecessary</i> 安静的 <i>quiet</i> 不愉快的 <i>unpleasant</i> 压抑的 <i>oppressive</i> 高压的 <i>having high blood pressure</i> 不甘的 <i>displeased</i> 失望的 <i>disappointed, having lost hope</i> 委屈的 <i>offended</i> 艰难的 <i>difficult, burdensome</i> 坚持不懈 <i>persevering</i> 忍术 (<i>rěnrshù – Ninjutsu</i>) <i>lit. Japanese martial art</i>	1

a heart under a sharp blade, explicitly unveils a marked complexity of cultural and philosophical representations in ancient China. The key to understanding this character lies in its visual image: the heart, symbolising feelings, emotions, and the essence of a person, is under a sharp blade – a metaphor for threat, pain,

and trial. This reminds us that true patience is not merely external calmness or stoic endurance in the face of difficulties, but a deep inner state in which a person maintains their emotional integrity and moral principles even in the toughest circumstances (Afonasenko, 2011).

Table 2
Scales used to evaluate the concept of 'rěn'

No.	NEGATIVE POLARITY	POSITIVE POLARITY
1.	不重要 <i>unimportant</i>	重要 <i>important</i>
2.	坏 <i>bad</i>	好 <i>good</i>
3.	无益的 <i>useless</i>	有利的 <i>useful</i>
4.	易激动的 <i>emotional</i>	合理的 <i>rational</i>
5.	无效果的 <i>unproductive</i>	有成效的 <i>productive</i>
6.	不必要的 <i>unnecessary</i>	必要的 <i>necessary</i>
7.	破坏性的 <i>destructive</i>	有创造力的 <i>creative</i>
8.	恶性的 <i>evil</i>	慈善的 <i>benevolent</i>
9.	消极 <i>passive</i>	积极 <i>active</i>
10.	危险 <i>dangerous</i>	安全 <i>safe</i>
11.	虚伪的 <i>insincere</i>	诚恳 <i>sincere</i>
12.	糊涂 <i>stupid</i>	聪明 <i>smart</i>
13.	可怕 <i>horrible</i>	美丽 <i>beautiful</i>
14.	忧郁的 <i>sad</i>	快乐的 <i>happy</i>
15.	无意识的 <i>unconscious</i>	有意识的 <i>conscious</i>
16.	翻脸 <i>impulsive</i>	和好 <i>peaceful</i>

Notably, the character *rěn* encompasses both positive and negative features, which highlights the uniqueness of Chinese cultural logic, where words and symbols often have complex, ambivalent interpretations. Thus, the same word can describe valour and courage, as well as cruelty, emphasising the fine line between different expressions of human nature.

In Chinese culture, patience and cruelty can be two sides of the same coin: '... about someone who dares to kill a person, they say *rěn*, and people call it cruelty. About someone who does not dare to kill a person, they also say *rěn*, and people call this patience' (Shi, 2019). This reflects how ancient Chinese rulers coexisted with both strength and gentleness, and how they used these qualities in governing their subjects and making decisions.

Therefore, the character *rěn* goes beyond a simple dichotomy and opens up a spectrum of meanings related to human capacity for self-control, wisdom, and deep moral choice between action and restraint. It serves as a reminder that human life is full of opposites, and our inner state, our choice at any given moment, reflects a deep connection between our internal beliefs and external actions. Thus, hieroglyph *rěn* represents the notion

of inner strength and resilience, allowing individuals to face challenges and adversities without complaining. It holds significant value in the longstanding Chinese principles of morality, self-discipline, and consideration for others. In Chinese culture, the practice of patience holds utmost importance across various spheres of life, including education, professional endeavours, family interactions, and spiritual pursuits. It is believed that patience serves to overcome obstacles and achieve goals. Furthermore, this symbol is linked to the concept of personal growth, suggesting the capacity to conquer individual shortcomings and undesirable traits.

According to Chinese dictionaries, the hieroglyph *rěn* has between 6 and 10 meanings. It should be noted that the same character in the Chinese language functions as a noun, verb, adjective, and adverb. Based on dictionary interpretations and contexts, the following meanings of the lexeme *rěn* can be identified (Online Idiom Collection, 2024; BKRS, 2024; Gu, 2009; CCD, 2002; CCD, 2016).

1. The ability and skill to endure, endurance: 必有忍乃有济 *lit. The existence of patience is necessary for success.*

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2. To bear; endure; tolerate; put up with (pain, difficulty, misfortune): 他一声不吭地忍住了疼痛 *lit. He bore the pain without a word of complaint.* The contexts include the following examples of what can be endured: 忍事 (rěnshì) *enduring various matters with a patient attitude*; 忍容 (rěnróng) *tolerance*; 忍辱负重 (rěn rù fù zhòng) *endure humiliation in order to carry out an important mission*; 忍顺 (rěnshùn) *enduring and accepting*; 忍从 (rěncóng) *enduring compliance*; 忍羞 (rěnxū) *enduring humiliation*; 忍气 (rěngqì) *enduring others' insults*; 忍垢 (rěngòu) *enduring filth*; 忍丑 (rěngǒu) *enduring disgrace*; 忍耻 (rěngǐ) *enduring shame*; 忍痛 (rěngòng) *enduring pain.*

3. To restrain, suppress; not to express one's emotions or feelings: 忍着点, 别为了一点小事发火 *lit. Be patient. Don't lose your temper over trivial matters.*

4. To control (laughter, tears): 忍着眼泪 *lit. hold back one's tears*; 忍俊不禁/忍不住笑 *lit. cannot help laughing.*

5. To be hard-hearted enough to; have the heart to: 我不忍看你这样 *lit. I can't bear to see you like this.*

6. To perform one's duties: 强忍犯义 *lit. reluctantly (forcefully) performing one's duties and violating one's obligations.*

7. Flexible, strong, enduring: 柔(强) 忍之木 *lit. a tree that bends easily (with difficulty).*

8. Callous, insensitive, ruthless, cruel: 于心不忍 *lit. not to have the heart to do something.*

9. To permit, yield: 是可忍也, 孰不可忍也? *lit. Is this bearable? What is intolerable?*

This multifaceted nature of patience reflected in the dictionaries is supported by the results of the respondent survey as presented in Table 1. Five meaningful cultural values associated with patience can be inferred.

1. Tolerance and forgiveness. The presence of 宽容的 *tolerant* and 宽恕的 *indulgent, magnanimous, forgiving* suggests that patience is culturally valued as the ability to tolerate, forgive, and show compassion towards others' shortcomings or mistakes.

2. Resilience and endurance. Words like 坚强 *unwavering, 坚韧 tough, durable, resilient*, and 坚持不懈 *persevering* indicate that patience is associated with resilience, endurance, and the ability to persist in the face of challenges or adversity.

3. Acceptance and endurance. Words like painful, suffering, intolerable, and oppressive imply that patience involves accepting pain, suffering, and oppression without complaint or resistance.

4. Humility and restraint. The presence of words like modest, calm, and restrained, composed suggests that patience is linked to humility, tranquility, and self-restraint, where individuals maintain composure and humility even in difficult situations.

5. Adaptability and compromise. The inclusion of words like compromising and yielding suggests that patience can involve adaptability, flexibility, and willingness to compromise in interpersonal relationships or challenging situations.

Throughout history, outstanding Chinese philosophers, statesmen, and scholars, such as Lao Tzu (Chen, 2009) and Confucius (Li, 2023), have consistently advocated for the cultivation of this moral principle. Li and Mou (2020) see patience as a significant result of the accumulation of traditional Chinese culture in people's cognition, characterised by its localness, rootedness, and comprehensiveness. Stating that the culture of patience co-exists within the Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist systems, the researchers describe Confucian patience as centred around 'benevolence'. Taoism advocates for 'contentment, non-competition, and limited desires'; while Buddhist thought believes that life's suffering should be transcended through Nirvana, achieving the highest state of selflessness (Li & Mou, 2020). A Confucian philosopher Mencius had a unique perspective on the nature of patience, having proposed that the inability to bear is the beginning of benevolence. His idea of patience that nurtures, sustains, and develops is of major importance for today's Chinese society (Li & Mou, 2020). The connection between 忍 and the ancient ethical and philosophical teachings of Confucianism can be traced along the main principle of Confucianism, 礼 (lǐ) (ritual propriety). According to the Chinese dictionary, 礼 stands for etiquette, propriety, rules of politeness, rules of decency; politeness, courtesy, tact, and culture (as the basis of Confucian worldview), indicating a tactful, polite, cultured person or act. Adherence to etiquette (ceremony) contributes to the formation of 'the noble person' or 君子 (jūnzǐ). In our view, the noble person should possess patience, as following the ritual requires overcoming oneself, one's ambitions, and maintaining one's dignity or 面子 (miànzi). All these concepts constitute the essence of 忍.

Consequently, Chinese is rich with quotations, proverbs, and idioms that underscore the importance of patience. The proverbs and sayings of a language are like windows into the collective mindset of a people, verbally expressed 'stereotypes of the people's consciousness' (Maslova, 2001, p. 33). They mirror the dynamics of social interactions, their history, and shape both material and spiritual aspects of society. The paremiological fund of the language is directly linked to the cultural dominant values. In this regard, of special interest is a Chinese collection of admonitions or maxims that encourage patience entitled 忍经劝忍百箴 (*lit. The sutra of forbearance: one hundred admonitions to encourage forbearance*) by Xu (2018). The two prefaces in this book provide insight into its theme and purpose. The first preface introduces the concept of patience as a virtue essential for navigating life's challenges and emphasises its significance across various historical contexts in China. It highlights the wisdom and teachings of such famous figures as Confucius and ancient Chinese rulers who valued patience as a fundamental trait for personal development and societal harmony. The second preface offers a detailed examination of the origins and significance of proverbs in Chinese culture, particularly their role in reflecting

societal values and providing guidance for moral conduct. It emphasises the importance of proverbs as repositories of cultural wisdom and suggests that the collection of proverbs in the book will serve as a source of inspiration and guidance for cultivating patience in daily life.

The content analysis of the maxims shows that they encompass a wide range of behaviours, from controlling anger (气之忍第二) and maintaining composure in facial expressions (色之忍第三) to practicing moderation in eating (食之忍第六) and drinking (酒之忍第四), and other forms of everyday behaviour, like showing restraint in joy (乐之忍第七). The first maxim (presumably the most important one) telling the reader to be patient in words (言之忍第一) echoes similar themes found in Christian teachings, such as the importance of controlling one's speech to avoid causing harm: 乱之所生也, 则言语以为阶; 口三五之门, 祸由此来 (*lit. 'The chaos arises from words, serving as the steps to disorder; the mouth, with its three or five openings, is the gate from which calamity comes'*). Thus, each maxim/admonition brings into the focus the value of patience in building harmony, self-discipline, and virtuous conduct within oneself and in relationships with others.

The maxims also emphasise the importance of patience in different social roles and interactions, including serving one's ruler faithfully (事君之忍第八十四), maintaining harmonious relations within families, including between a father and a son (父子之忍第九十一), older and younger brothers (兄弟之忍第九十二), and spouses (夫妇之忍第九十三), and showing respect and restraint in various social contexts, such as between a host and a guest (宾主之忍第九十四). Whether in familial relationships between parents and children, siblings, or spouses, or in broader social interactions among friends, guests, and hosts, the virtue of patience is considered essential for ensuring understanding, harmony, and social cohesion.

The maxims also highlight the value of patience in personal growth and learning, suggesting that perseverance and endurance in the face of challenges are crucial for intellectual and moral development. For example, the maxim to practice patience in studying (好学忍第一百) reflects the belief that true wisdom comes from disciplined study and reflection over time.

Overall, the maxims/admonitions collected in the book confirm the deep-rooted nature of such cultural values as restraint, self-discipline, and harmonious relations.

A similar attitude to patience is presented in the textbook for foreign students *Speaking Chinese and Talking about Chinese Culture* (Wu & Cheng, 2008), where a whole chapter is dedicated to *rèn*. In the textbook, three aspects of patience are discussed.

The first aspect is embodied in the phrase 好汉不吃眼前亏, which can be translated into English as 'a true man will never make a fool of himself in front of everyone'. This expression implies that a wise or strong person knows how to avoid immediate disadvantages or does not act impulsively to their detriment. Thus, this concept together with 三十六计, 走为上计 (*lit. of all the 36 stratagems, retreat is the best*) brings to light the strategic

aspect of patience in Chinese culture emphasising the importance of timing and situation assessment. In fact, this perspective aligns with the broader Chinese tradition, as presented in classics like *The Art of War*, where indirect strategies and patience are often favoured over direct confrontation.

The second aspect, represented in the expression 君子报仇, 十年不晚 (*lit. for a nobleman to seek revenge, ten years is not too late*), suggests that for someone with noble character, patience in seeking retribution is a virtue, and there should be no rush to take revenge. It emphasises the idea that it is important to wait for the right moment, even if it takes a long time, highlighting the values of patience and strategic planning in addressing wrongs. On the other hand, the emphasis on not displaying anger impulsively and the importance of making concessions in relationships interpret patience as a key value in maintaining social harmony and personal relationships. In broad terms, this phrase reflects the Confucian value of interpersonal harmony and the importance of regulating one's emotions to preserve societal order.

The third aspect of patience is encapsulated in the phrase 小不忍则乱大谋, which translates as 'a little impatience can ruin a great plan' or 'lack of forbearance in small matters upsets great plans'. It is an illustration for the ability to endure short-term discomfort for the sake of long-term achievements and reflects a philosophical stance that values perseverance and forbearance.

In the textbook, it is shown that patience in Chinese culture is not a simple or singular concept, but a multifaceted value intertwined with strategic thinking, social harmony, personal virtue, and long-term vision. Patience is presented as a reflection of self-respect and respect for others, crucial for maintaining 'face' or dignity, especially in public or unfamiliar settings. Moreover, the concept of patience reveals broader ethical and philosophical principles that valorise self-control, respect for others, and the prioritisation of collective well-being over individual impulses. Patience is seen not just as a personal virtue but as a societal ideal that underpins social cohesion and ethical behaviour. It is deeply embedded in the cultural psyche, influencing behaviour, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making processes which makes it a central value in the traditional Chinese culture.

3.2. Patience in modern Chinese culture

The obtained results were subjected to statistical analysis and are outlined in Table 3.

When interpreting the experiment results, it is important to recognise that numerical data should not be taken as absolute. There are several limitations of the scaling results. The first one concerns the sample size: with only 34 participants, it is relatively small, which limits the generalisability of the results to the broader Chinese-speaking population. The second limitation relates to the participants' age and educational background: given that all respondents are within the 18-30 age range and are either students or postgraduate students, the findings may not accurately represent the perceptions of older age groups or those with different educational or professional backgrounds.

Table 3
Results of the 'rěn' evaluation survey

No.	SCALE	AVERAGE RATING	NUMBER OF 0 RATINGS (%)
1.	不重要 <i>unimportant</i> – 重要 <i>important</i>	1.25	11
2.	坏 <i>bad</i> – 好 <i>good</i>	0.35	11
3.	无益的 <i>useless</i> – 有利的 <i>useful</i>	0.41	35
4.	易激动的 <i>emotional</i> – 合理的 <i>rational</i>	0.65	41
5.	无效果的 <i>unproductive</i> – 有成效的 <i>productive</i>	0.3	17
6.	不必要的 <i>unnecessary</i> – 必要的 <i>necessary</i>	1.3	17
7.	破坏性的 <i>destructive</i> – 有创造力的 <i>creative</i>	0.06	29
8.	恶性的 <i>evil</i> – 慈善的 <i>benevolent</i>	1	29
9.	消极 <i>passive</i> – 积极 <i>active</i>	0.18	41
10.	危险 <i>dangerous</i> – 安全 <i>safe</i>	0.53	29
11.	虚伪的 <i>insincere</i> – 诚恳 <i>sincere</i>	-0,06	29
12.	糊涂 <i>stupid</i> – 聪明 <i>smart</i>	0.53	29
13.	可怕 <i>horrible</i> – 美丽 <i>beautiful</i>	0.42	11
14.	忧郁的 <i>sad</i> – 快乐的 <i>happy</i>	-0.3	29
15.	无意识的 <i>unconscious</i> – 有意识的 <i>conscious</i>	1.1	23
16.	翻脸 <i>impulsive</i> – 和好 <i>peaceful</i>	0.35	11

The results are thus limited in their generalisability to the broader population. Thirdly, the educational setting of the respondents may have influenced their perceptions, as academic environment shapes individuals' understanding and values. The results might, therefore, lean towards academic or theoretical interpretations of patience rather than a broad, everyday understanding. The fourth limitation touches upon the regional variability of China: the concept under consideration might be perceived differently in various regions of China, and the participants' regional backgrounds were not specified in the personal information section. Therefore, regional cultural differences that could have influenced the results were not taken into account. One more limitation might be called a social desirability bias. We believe that the participants may have responded in a manner they believe is socially acceptable rather than their true feelings, especially on culturally significant concepts like rěn. Besides, the conducted scaling experiment did not provide any contextual information on rěn. Since the participants were not given any sufficient context or explanation of rěn within the questionnaire, their responses could be based on their immediate understanding, which could vary widely. Thus, these numerical findings, derived from data analysis, offer opportunities for comparisons

within the conducted experiment and with similar studies. One of the interesting findings from the experiment is the incidence of zero ratings provided in Table 3. This phenomenon can be interpreted as a refusal to rate on the given scale. Proper scales should align with the respondents' understanding of the concept of rěn in terms of the scale's semantic label. Since the scales were selected based on a preliminary survey, they should all be relevant for assessing the concept of rěn. However, given that not all participants in the preliminary experiment provided consistent characteristics for the concept under study, it raises a question about whether all the respondents were able to see a connection between rěn and a specific characteristic. The presence of zero responses can be treated as a means to determine the relevance of a particular characteristic in rating the concept under study. Overall, the number of zero ratings in each scale reflects the level of clarity and consensus among respondents regarding the concepts being evaluated. We are well aware that some scales might have semantic overlapping or redundancy, which leads to the confusion or the perception that the scales are asking the same question in different ways. This could result in participants defaulting to zero to avoid repetitive or redundant evaluations. For example, scales 不重要 *unimportant* – 重要

Therefore, rěn can be described as very important, very necessary, very conscious, rational, safe, smart, rather good, rather useful, rather productive, rather active, rather beautiful, and rather peaceful. The fact that the participants generally perceive patience as important, with higher average ratings for qualities such as important and necessary, suggests a cultural emphasis on rěn as a desirable trait

important (Scale 1) and 不必要的 unnecessary – 必要的 necessary (Scale 6) both address the relevance or significance of rěn. The concepts of importance and necessity can overlap, potentially causing confusion for participants. Similarly, the scales 易激动的 emotional – 合理的 rational (Scale 4) and 消极 passive – 积极 active (Scale 9), though not directly overlapping, could be conceptually related in the context of emotional regulation and behavior. Participants might find it difficult to distinguish between the emotional vs. rational spectrum and the passive vs. active spectrum. We should underscore that the overlapping scales were used to verify the reliability of responses, since if participants consistently rate overlapping scales similarly, it reinforces the reliability of the measurements.

For scales 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 15, which have a relatively high percentage of zero ratings (ranging from 17% to 41%), it can be suggested that a significant portion of respondents either found it difficult to make a judgment or did not see a clear distinction between the opposing characteristics. This could indicate ambiguity or complexity in the concepts being evaluated. Conversely, for scales 1, 2, 13, and 16, which have a relatively lower percentage of zero ratings (11%), it can be implied that most respondents were able to differentiate between the opposing concepts and provide a rating. This could suggest clearer distinctions or more intuitive understanding of these concepts among the participants.

The scales with the highest percentage of zero ratings are scale 4 (*emotional – rational*) and scale 9 (*passive – active*), with 41% of respondents giving a zero rating. This could indicate pronounced difficulty or reluctance among respondents to provide ratings in these categories. Thus, scales with a higher incidence of zero ratings may involve nuanced or multifaceted aspects of patience that are challenging to quantify or articulate within the constraints of a rating scale.

Moreover, when accounting for the high incidence of zero ratings, we should consider such a significant factor as the face-maintenance traditions in Chinese culture, often referred to as 'saving face' or 'mianzi' (面子). This concept involves maintaining social harmony and not causing embarrassment to oneself or others. The participants might have chosen zero ratings to avoid making strong judgments that could be perceived as disrespectful or critical, particularly on scales that might imply negative characteristics (e.g., *insincere – sincere*). Also, evaluating culturally significant concepts like rěn can be sensitive. It is possible that the participants might fear that their personal ratings could

be seen as misrepresenting or disrespecting a valued cultural concept, which eventually led them to choose neutral responses as a safer option. All in all, choosing a zero rating can be a way to avoid potential negative consequences.

Potential modifications that could provide more consistent responses may include making the scales more distinct by changing their wording. For example, we may use '表里不一 hypocritical – 真实 genuine' instead of '虚伪的 insincere – 诚恳 sincere'. Nevertheless, all change in scales requires returning to the stage of the preliminary survey. For the future research, we suggest using an iterative approach in order to refine the scales based on pilot testing and qualitative feedback.

Based on the respondents' ratings, we can construct a description of the concept of rěn, arranging characteristics in the descending order of intensity. To simplify, let us convert numerical values into verbal descriptors, which will allow us to gauge the extent to which the quality pertains to the concept of rěn: absolute values exceeding 1 will be labelled as *very*, the range between 0.5 and 1 will remain as it is, and the range from 0 to 0.5 will be denoted as *rather*. This approach provides a three-tiered classification of the extent to which the quality applies to the concept under study. Admittedly, this categorisation is somewhat arbitrary, and variations in the sample of participants may shift the boundaries. In our case, Chinese culture often emphasises moderation, harmony, and balance (Pavlovskaya, 2021), which may have contributed to the relatively moderate scores obtained in the evaluation of the concept of rěn. However, it allows for some general understanding of its cultural value.

Therefore, rěn can be described as *very important, very necessary, very conscious, rational, safe, smart, rather good, rather useful, rather productive, rather active, rather beautiful, and rather peaceful*. The fact that the participants generally perceive patience as important, with higher average ratings for qualities such as *important* and *necessary*, suggests a cultural emphasis on rěn as a desirable trait.

Based on the ratings provided by the respondents, we can discern certain patterns and tendencies regarding the concept of rěn. Let us analyse the characteristics in the descending order of intensity as indicated by the average ratings.

1. Unimportant (不重要) – Important (重要) / Unnecessary (不必要的) – Necessary (必要的). With an average rating of 1.25 and 1.3 correspondingly, respondents perceive importance and necessity as closely associated with the concept of rěn, suggesting that patience is considered essential or indispensable in Chinese culture.

2. Unconscious (无意识的) – Conscious (有意识的). With an average rating of 1.1, respondents perceive patience as more aligned with conscious awareness rather than unconscious behaviour. This implies that patience involves deliberate and intentional actions or attitudes in Chinese culture.

3. Evil (恶性的) – Benevolent (慈善的). This pair received an average rating of 1, indicating that rěn is strongly associated with goodness or benevolence. This aligns with the traditional understanding of patience as a virtuous quality in Chinese culture.

4. Emotional (易激动的) – Rational (合理的). With an average rating of 0.65, respondents view patience as more aligned with rationality rather than emotional impulsiveness. This may suggest that patience is associated with calmness and composure.

5. Dangerous (危险) – Safe (安全) / Stupid (糊涂) – Smart (聪明). Both have the average rating of 0.53, which may indicate that patience is generally perceived as contributing to safety and wisdom rather than posing a risk, which is a foolish way to behave. This implies that patience is seen as a protective or stabilising factor in Chinese society.

6. Horrible (可怕) – Beautiful (美丽). The average rating of 0.42 indicates that patience is generally associated with positivity (beauty) rather than negativity (horror). This suggests that patience is viewed as an admirable or desirable quality in Chinese culture.

7. Useless (无益的) – Useful (有利的). The average rating of 0.41 indicates that respondents perceive patience as more useful than useless, although this aspect is not as strongly associated with the concept of *rěn* as necessity or goodness. The distinction between 'necessary' and 'useful' may lie in their semantics. 'Necessary' implies something that is required or fundamental, suggesting an inherent importance or indispensability. On the other hand, 'useful' implies something that provides practical benefit or value, but it may not be deemed essential or crucial in the same way as something that is necessary. In the case of patience being rated higher for necessity (1.3) compared to usefulness (0.41), it suggests that respondents perceive patience as more of a fundamental aspect of the concept of *rěn* (necessity) rather than merely something that provides practical benefit or utility (usefulness). This could reflect a cultural perspective that values patience as an inherent virtue or principle, integral to the concept of *rěn*, rather than just a useful skill or trait.

8. Bad (坏) – Good (好). With an average rating of 0.35, this suggests a tendency towards viewing the concept of *rěn* as a positive attribute within Chinese culture, though the relatively low average rating is rather surprising.

9. Impulsive (翻脸) – Peaceful (和好). Although not as strongly endorsed as safety, peace, or rationality, this scale received a moderate average rating of 0.35. This suggests that patience is generally associated with maintaining harmony and avoiding conflict in Chinese culture.

10. Unproductive (无效果的) – Productive (有成效的). Despite its moderate rating of 0.3, this aspect indicates that patience is generally seen as contributing to productivity rather than being unproductive. This aligns with the idea that patience leads to better outcomes and achievements.

11. Destructive (破坏性的) – Creative (有创造力的) / Passive (消极) – Active (积极). Two minimal positive average ratings for the *Destructive – Creative* and *Passive – Active* scales offer interesting perspectives into the cultural nuances surrounding the concept of *rěn* in Chinese culture. The *Destructive – Creative* rating is slightly above neutral (0.06), indicating that respondents barely associate patience more with creativity than destructiveness. This could suggest that while patience is not strongly seen

as a creative force, it is also not considered destructive. This minimal positive skew towards creativity could be interpreted as recognising that patience allows for a thoughtful and measured approach to problem-solving and innovation. It suggests that while patience might not directly inspire creativity, it creates an environment for creative thought by preventing hasty decisions and fostering a more reflective mindset. However, the close-to-neutral score also reflects a possible uncertainty or ambivalence among respondents about the role of patience in enabling creativity. Similarly, the *Passive – Active* scale's average rating (0.18) indicates a slight lean towards viewing patience as more active than passive, albeit not strongly so. This perception challenges the common stereotype of patience being merely a passive virtue. It implies that respondents see an element of active engagement or agency in patience. This could be understood as recognising that patience involves a conscious choice to wait, to endure, or to persistently engage with a situation until a more favourable outcome emerges. It highlights a subtle appreciation of patience as requiring mental and emotional effort, suggesting it is an active process of self-control and deliberate inaction or timing one's actions for maximum effectiveness.

Both minimal positive associations challenge simplistic interpretations of patience. Instead of seeing it purely as a passive and non-creative trait, there is recognition of the active choice and potential for creative problem-solving within the practice of patience. These results point to the complexity of the concept of *rěn* in Chinese culture, suggesting that it involves endurance, strategic timing, and potential creativity that is often overlooked in common understanding of patience.

12. Insincere (虚伪的) – Sincere (诚恳). The results also show negative average ratings in two scales. With an average rating of -0.06, the *Insincere – Sincere* scale indicates a slight leaning towards insincerity. In the context of patience, this could imply that respondents might perceive overly patient behaviour as potentially insincere or not genuine. It is important to note that the score is very close to neutral, suggesting that opinions on this may be divided or that the association between patience and sincerity is nuanced, which could reflect a cultural perception where being too patient is sometimes seen as not being honest about one's feelings or intentions.

13. Sad (忧郁的) – Happy (快乐的). The average rating here is -0.3, indicating a tendency to associate patience more with sadness than happiness. This result might suggest that patience, within the surveyed participants' view, carries a somewhat negative emotional connotation, possibly because it is often exercised in challenging or undesirable situations. Patience might be seen as a virtue that is necessary in difficult times, hence the association with a less positive emotional state.

4. CONCLUSION

The research, which aimed at investigating and examining the shift in the attitude to 忍 *rěn* (patience) in Chinese culture, has revealed that despite modernisation and societal changes, the value of patience remains deeply rooted in Chinese culture.

Traditional virtues of *rěn*, such as patience, endurance, and forbearance, continue to hold significance in contemporary society. Nevertheless, the negative scores provide, in our view, interesting insights into the nuanced view of *rěn* in Chinese culture. While *rěn* is generally considered a virtue, its practice is not without some perceived downsides. The slight inclination towards insincerity might suggest ambivalence about the expression of patience, possibly reflecting a tension between traditional values emphasising stoic endurance and modern values that generally prize authenticity and emotional expression. Similarly, the association with sadness rather than happiness might underscore the recognition that *rěn* is often a response to adversity or conflict, reinforcing its value as a coping mechanism but also acknowledging the emotional toll it can take. Recognising this emotional toll of traditional *rěn*, social policies should promote mental health support systems. Initiatives could include counselling services, stress management workshops, and public awareness campaigns about mental health. Also, schools and universities should be encouraged to introduce lessons on emotional intelligence, teaching students to balance patience and endurance with emotional expression and sincerity. This could help students develop a healthier understanding of *rěn*.

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