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Research on the Integration of *The Analects of Confucius* and Ideological and Political Education in Universities

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Abstract

The Confucian classic The Analects of Confucius is a work that has influenced Chinese thought and culture for thousands of years, and its many core ideas such as “benevolence” “righteousness” and “propriety” have inherent compatibility with the core values of Chinese socialism. This article takes the core connotation of The Analects of Confucius as the theoretical basis, explores its modern value and the pathway of integration with ideological and political education in universities, proposes the “three in one” application model which refers to integration into the ideological and political curriculum system, integration into cultural practice, and integration into campus environment. This will aim to provide a new idea of traditional cultural empowerment for ideological and political education, and give reference and guidance for the innovation and development of ideological and political education in universities.

Keywords

The Analects of Confucius, Integration, Ideological and political education

1. Introduction

The Confucian classic *The Analects of Confucius* (《论语》) is a compilation of Confucius' words, deeds, and thoughts recorded by his disciples and later scholars. It is a work that has influenced Chinese thought and culture for thousands of years. Its content is profound and extensive, and as a Confucian classic, it has long been highly regarded. Its philosophical ideas, moral concepts, and attitudes towards life have exerted a wide and profound impact on the cultural and intellectual history of China. It is an extremely precious spiritual wealth in human heritage. Mr. Nan Huaijin (南怀瑾), a renowned scholar, once said, “As for the value of Confucianism and the book of *The Analects of Confucius*, regardless of the era or region, as long as the original meaning of the text is not misinterpreted, it will always have an indestructible immortal value. For young learners, if they can study diligently, think carefully,

distinguish clearly, and apply it in a comprehensive manner in their actions, its value will surely be self-proven.” Many ideas contained in *The Analects of Confucius*, such as “benevolence” (仁), “righteousness” (义) and “propriety” (礼) and so on, have inherent compatibility with the core values of Chinese socialism, and they are undoubtedly a kind of rich spiritual nourishment that contemporary college students should assimilate. In the new historical period, it is quite necessary to study the ideological essence of *The Analects of Confucius* comprehensively, excavate its rich ideological connotations intensively, and integrate them into current ideological and political education in universities, which not only helps us scientifically understand the spiritual essence of traditional moral education in a modern sense, but also helps improve the effectiveness and quality of current ideological and political education in universities, effectively inherit and promote excellent traditional Chinese culture, thereby enhancing the ideological quality and moral level of college students, guiding them to establish correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values.

2. The Essence of Thoughts in *The Analects of Confucius* and Its Modern Educational Value

2.1 Taking “Benevolence” as the Foundation

The concept of “benevolence” is one of the core ideas in *The Analects of Confucius*, which embodies Confucius’ basic views and moral requirements on the relationship between people. “Benevolence” is the highest moral realm in Confucius’ moral cultivation that integrates various beautiful qualities such as kindheartedness, filial piety and fraternal duty, loyalty and forgiveness, courtesy, courage, sincerity and honesty, etc. In Confucius’ view, “benevolence” is not only an external behavioral norm, but also an internal moral quality and spiritual pursuit. Confucius once said, “If a superior man abandon benevolence, how can he fulfil the requirements of that name? The superior man does not, even for the space of a single meal, act contrary to benevolence. In moments of haste, he cleaves to it. In seasons of danger, he cleaves to it.” (君子去仁，恶乎成名？君子无终食之间违仁，造次必于是，颠沛必于是) Confucius once praised Yan Hui (颜回) that, “He never go against benevolence in his heart for a long time.” (其心三月不违仁) Yan Hui was called as “Another Sage” (复圣) in later generations and was one of Confucius’ proudest disciples. Confucius’ high praise for Yan Hui also indicates his moral requirement of putting benevolence first. The concept of “benevolence” or “benevolent person” in Confucius’ mind roughly includes the following aspects: The first one is “benevolent person loves others” (仁者爱人), which means loving others, that is, loving the general members of human society, and promoting it from kinship to all mankind; The second is “loyalty and forgiveness” (忠恕), which emphasizes loyalty and trustworthiness towards people and things, treating others sincerely, being tolerant and understanding, and not holding grudges against others; The third is that, “when you want to establish yourself, help others establish themselves; and when you want to develop yourself, help others develop as well” (己欲立而立人，己欲达而达人) and “one should not impose on others what he himself does not desire” (己所不欲，勿施于人), that is to say, one should use one’s own likes and dislikes as the criterion for choosing, extend oneself to others, and not impose one’s own unwilling

things on others; The fourth principle is “to achieve the realm of benevolence and virtue by restraining personal desires and returning to propriety” (克己复礼为仁), to achieve the integration and unity of benevolence and propriety by “not looking at what is contrary to propriety, not listening to what is contrary to propriety, not speaking what is contrary to propriety, or not doing what is contrary to propriety” (非礼勿视, 非礼勿听, 非礼勿言, 非礼勿动), to be benevolent in one’s heart, and to speak and act in accordance with propriety. It can be seen that the connotation of benevolence is very rich, including love, respect, understanding, and help for others, as well as cultivation and improvement of one’s own inner self. The “friendliness” in the core values of Chinese socialism emphasizes treating others with kindness and caring for others, which is highly compatible with the Confucian concept of “benevolence” in terms of people-oriented thinking. At the same time, the Confucian concept of “benevolence” not only focuses on personal cultivation, reflecting respect and care for people, but also embodies responsibility and love for the family and the country. The “patriotism” in the core values of Chinese socialism reflects a deep affection and sense of responsibility for the motherland, which echoes the Confucian patriotism.

2.2 Taking “Righteousness” as the Quality

“Righteousness”, representing morality and justice, is a highly summarized concept of moral behavior in Confucianism. It is explained in “*The Doctrine of the Mean*” (《中庸》) in *The Book of Rites* (《礼记》), which states that, “The principle of righteousness refers to dealing with things in a reasonable and rational manner” (义者, 宜也). *The Analects of Confucius* states, “A gentleman regards righteousness as his quality” (君子以义为质). Prioritizing righteousness over profit, valuing righteousness and belittling profit, and even giving up profit to pursuing righteousness is a moral code of conduct advocated by Confucianism. *The Analects of Confucius* insists that one’s behavior and actions should be based on righteousness, opposes the idea of “living in groups all day long and not speaking of righteousness” (群居终日, 言不及义), and advocates “practicing righteousness to achieve one’s moral goal” (行义以达其道). *The Analects of Confucius* states, “A gentleman values righteousness above all else” (君子以义为上), “A gentleman who has courage but lacks righteousness will become a rebellion, and a petty person who has courage but lacks righteousness will become a robber” (君子有勇而无义为乱, 小人有勇而无义为盗). “Courage” only has true value and becomes a virtue of a gentleman under the guidance of “righteousness”. *The Analects of Confucius* states, “A gentleman deals with the affairs in the world without specifying what must be done or not be done, only considering what is in accordance with righteousness” (君子之于天下也, 无适也, 无莫也, 义之与比). Confucius believed that a gentleman may not follow dogmatic rules, but must meet the requirements of “righteousness” and take “righteousness” as the principle of action, doing what he should do and what he shouldn’t do. Confucius also said, “In the eating of coarse rice and the drinking of water, the using of one’s elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found. Wealth and the rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds.” (饭疏食饮水, 曲肱而枕之, 乐亦在其中矣。不义而富且贵, 于我如浮云) It is highly advocated to pursuing benevolence and virtue, being content with poverty,

underestimating the wealth and prosperity that come from injustice, and not being tempted by materialism, environment, and vanity. The Confucian concept of “righteousness” represents the moral principles of justice, fairness, and reasonableness, and serves as the standard for judging the legitimacy of behavior. The “justice” in the core values of Chinese socialism means fairness and justice, which is consistent with the Confucian concept of “righteousness” in terms of justice. At the same time, the Confucian concept of “righteousness” emphasizes the responsibility and obligation of individuals to society and others. The “dedication” in the core values of Chinese socialism requires people to take their work seriously and responsibly, pursue excellence, which is actually a manifestation of fulfilling personal responsibilities and obligations, and has similarities with the Confucian concept of “righteousness” in terms of responsibility. Advocating the concept of righteousness in ideological and political education in universities can help cultivate young students’ sense of justice and responsibility.

2.3 Taking “Propriety” as the Form

“Propriety”, as a social norm and code of conduct, provides clear guidance for people’s daily behavior. *The Analects of Confucius* states, “A gentleman regards righteousness as his quality, and perform it in the form of propriety” (君子义以为质，礼以行之). “Propriety” is the norm for a gentleman to practice virtue, which is a moral requirement and norm based on the internal consciousness of “benevolence” and “righteousness” to externally constrain his own behavior. It is a manifestation of the content of benevolence and righteousness, or a specific regulation based on benevolence and righteousness. Benevolence and righteousness are the core of propriety, and propriety is the manifestation of benevolence and righteousness. The cultivation of “propriety” is to restrain one’s bad habits and indulgence. “Do not look at what is contrary to propriety, not listen to what is contrary to propriety, not speak what is contrary to propriety, or not do what is contrary to propriety” (非礼勿视，非礼勿听，非礼勿言，非礼勿动), that is to say, one should restrain his behavior and make it conform to the norm of propriety. If there is no restraint, one may go to extremes. The ideal personality of Confucius is a person who is fundamentally based on inner “benevolence” and “righteousness”, and whose external behavior fully conforms to “propriety”. One should adhere to norms in their internal moral cultivation, life attitude, and external speech and behavior, with benevolence and righteousness as the core and civilized behavior and elegant demeanor as their appearance, in order to achieve the organic unity of internal beauty and external beauty. The Confucian concept of “propriety” is a set of norms that regulate individual and social behavior, aimed at maintaining social order and promoting interpersonal harmony. The “harmony” in the core values of Chinese socialism represents the coordinated development of all aspects of society, where people and nature coexist harmoniously, and is consistent with the Confucian goal of “propriety” in maintaining social order and harmony. At the same time, the “civilization” in the core values of Chinese socialism represents social progress and cultural prosperity, and is closely related to the Confucian “propriety” in the inheritance and development of civilization. Emphasizing the importance of propriety in ideological and political education in universities can help guide students form good behavioral habits and social propriety, thereby enhancing their personal

qualities and social adaptability. By cultivating students' awareness of social propriety, they can treat others with courtesy and respect both inside and outside the campus, creating a harmonious and friendly campus atmosphere.

3. The Challenges of Ideological and Political Education in Universities Currently

With the rapid development of society and the continuous updating of information technology, the ideological concepts and values of college students are undergoing profound changes, and the ideological and political education in universities is also facing severe challenges currently. On the one hand, the ideological and political education courses still mainly adopt traditional theoretical teaching methods, with relatively outdated contents and a lack of sense of the times and less relevance to reality. The traditional cramming teaching method ignores the subject status of students, and students often passively receive knowledge, unable to deeply understand and experience the connotation and value of ideological and political education, and unable to enlighten their hearts effectively. On the other hand, contemporary college students are living in an era of information explosion, where they are exposed to increasingly diverse information and cultures. This diverse input of information has had a significant impact on the values and ideological concepts of college students. Nowadays quite a number of teenagers underestimate our own national culture and abandon the excellent essence of traditional culture, worship western ideas and culture, uphold individualism and advocate the expression of individuality, which leads to the emergence of self-centered egoism, the pursuit of comfort and pleasure, the lack of life goals and collective concepts. Lack of social responsibility and self-centered egoism have become common problems among some contemporary college students. A large proportion of students believe that the purpose of learning is "to have a good future" and "to earn more money and live a good life". The issue of values orientation among teenagers is not only influenced by the modern society's technological, materialistic, and utilitarian adult world, but also by school education, in which the phenomenon of emphasizing intelligence over morality, emphasizing science and engineering over humanities, emphasizing textbooks over practice, emphasizing material functionality over humanistic qualities is still quite common.

Many experts on Chinese issues believe that the moral and personality problems of Chinese teenagers are the inevitable result of denying traditional value education. To fundamentally solve the problem, it is necessary to return to traditional value education. Famous scholar Zhang Rulun pointed out, "Traditional education is an inward oriented education, in which teachers work inward to enrich and improve their inner selves and enhance their personality. Modern education, based on the requirements of modern economic development, no longer focuses on the comprehensive development and improvement of individuals themselves, nor does it care about the cultivation and improvement of personality. Instead, it only trains professionals who meet the needs of social and economic development, using people as tools to cultivate them. This leads to a decline in students' comprehensive quality, narrow knowledge, lack of moral ideals and judgment abilities, and lack of humanistic

education and care.” In this sense, it surely has profound practical and historical significance that we devote to critically inheriting history and tradition, excavating the reasonable components of traditional education, grasping the ideological essence of *The Analects of Confucius*, excavating its rich ideological connotations, and integrating it into current ideological and political education in universities, according to the current situation of moral education in contemporary universities and the aim of the cultivation of students’ sound personality.

4. The Selection of Content from *The Analects of Confucius* Which is Suitable for Integration with Ideological and Political Education

4.1 The Sentiment of Taking the World as One’s Own Responsibility

We should try to promote the sentiment of taking the world as one’s own responsibility and enhance the sense of historical mission and social responsibility of contemporary college students to contribute to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. *The Analects of Confucius* states, “Ambitious people must have lofty aspirations and strong willpower, because they shoulder significant missions and the road to struggle is long. Isn’t it significant to take the realization of benevolence as one’s own responsibility? Struggling for a lifetime and dying, isn’t the road still long?” (士不可以不弘毅，任重而道远。仁以为己任，不亦重乎？死而后已，不亦远乎？) This sense of responsibility and patriotism towards the world has influenced a large number of patriotic scholars such as Gu Yanwu and Lin Zexu. Today, in such a new era of reform, opening up, and modernization construction, college students should shoulder the heavy responsibility of building a strong country and enriching the people. Therefore, college students must carry forward the patriotic tradition and mission consciousness of Confucianism, cultivate a high degree of patriotism and a strong sense of social responsibility. They should turn patriotism into practical actions, strive to study hard and aspire to become useful talents for the country and society, and work hard to actively participate in the socialist construction, and ultimately contribute their greatest strength to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

4.2 The Value Concept of Valuing Righteousness Over Profit

We should promote the value concept of valuing righteousness over profit, cultivate the spirit of valuing righteousness over profit and sacrificing one’s life for righteousness among contemporary college students, and try to establish a correct view of righteousness and profit, and a noble value of life. Efforts should be made to promote the noble and righteous spirit of Confucianism, taking the emphasis on righteousness over profit as the basic value orientation, improving the spiritual realm and moral sentiment of contemporary college students, maintaining their own integrity, not being influenced by external things, achieving the goal of “never being corrupted by neither riches nor honors, shaken by neither poverty nor adversity, faltered by neither threats nor force” (富贵不能淫，贫贱不能移，威武不能屈). It is highly advocated to do not compromise or humiliate oneself for material desires, do not lose one’s personality for the sake of money or material benefits, do not bow down to social ugliness, be willing to live in poverty, be willing to contribute, work hard, and become a person with noble

morality, free from low-level interests, and beneficial to the people. The “righteousness” referred to here mainly refers to the interests of the country and the people. We should consciously cultivate the ideological consciousness of prioritizing social interests among contemporary students, and put the interests of the country and the people above everything else.

4.3 *The Enterprising Spirit of Self-improvement*

We should promote the enterprising concept of self-improvement and guide contemporary college students to establish lofty life ideals and good moral behavior. The spirit of perseverance and self-improvement is an indispensable spiritual driving force and intellectual source for a nation. For the country and the nation, this spirit of self-improvement values the overall value of society and others, emphasizes the restraint of personal selfishness for the greater good of the country and the nation, and values the grand aspirations and virtues of the nation. For the individual subject, this spirit of self-improvement can enable individuals to reach the lofty realm of selflessness and fearlessness. It is the spiritual driving force for individuals to achieve great things. Only with the spirit of self-improvement can a person not be defeated by difficulties and setbacks, and can they firmly and persistently maintain enterprising spirit in the bumpy life process, tirelessly strive to pursue established goals, and ultimately succeed.

4.4 *The Intercourse Concept of Emulating and Trying to Equal the Wise*

We should promote the intercourse concept of emulating and trying to equal the wise and persisting in regular self-reflection, and promote the formation of good moral qualities among contemporary college students, and cultivate a sense of harmonious coexistence among contemporary college students. *The Analects of Confucius* states, “When we see a man of virtue and talent, we should think of equaling them; when we see a man of a contrary character, we should turn inwards and examine ourselves” (见贤思齐焉，见不贤而内自省也). Confucius advocated that friends should share common ideals and pursuits, and live in groups to learn from each other, promote emotional integration, and enhance unity. Confucius’ disciple Zengzi inherited Confucius’ ideas and advocated to “make friends through academic exchange and sharing, and cultivate benevolence and virtue through mutual help among friends” (以文会友，以友辅仁), that is to say, one can use the exchange and sharing of knowledge and learning as a means or a way to make friends, and use mutual assistance to cultivate benevolence and virtue as the purpose of making friends. One should gather friends with rich knowledge and moral qualities, and friends can improve each other by active discussion and communication. This is not only beneficial for improving academic level, but also for enhancing moral cultivation, and is exactly the correct way to make friends. We should encourage contemporary college students to learn from the virtuous, reflect on their shortcomings, make beneficial friends, be good at listening to criticism from others, bravely admit their mistakes, and be willing to live in groups and coexist harmoniously. This has significant practical significance for building a harmonious campus and society.

5. Exploration of Pathways for Integrating *The Analects of Confucius* into Ideological and Political Education in Universities

5.1 Integration into the Ideological and Political Curriculum System

It is helpful to integrate the essence of *The Analects of Confucius* with the ideological and political curriculum system in universities, which not only can enrich the teaching content of ideological and political courses, but also deepen college students' understanding of traditional culture and modern social values. The selected reading content of *The Analects of Confucius* can be carefully designed and arranged. Based on the template of ideological and political education and the actual needs of students, we can select representative and inspiring classical sentences and chapters, and make them be cleverly integrated and connected with the relevant content of ideological and political courses. By guiding students to deeply study and think about these contents, it can help them understand the core ideas of benevolence, righteousness and propriety contained in *The Analects of Confucius*, and then internalize these ideas into their own values and behavioral norms. We can use the way of case teaching, carefully select classical cases from *The Analects of Confucius*, such as "Confucius and his disciples discuss doctrine" (孔子与弟子论道), "The joy of Yan Hui" (颜回之乐), etc. and combine them with practical problems in modern society to guide students to conduct in-depth analysis and discussion. Integrating the essence of *The Analects of Confucius* with ideological and political education in universities can help continuously improve the pertinence and effectiveness of ideological and political courses, enhance the theoretical depth and cultural heritage of ideological and political courses, and help college students better understand and grasp the core values of socialism with Chinese characteristics and social moral norms.

5.2 Integration into Cultural Practice

We can carry out many rich and diverse campus cultural activities, actively inherit and promote the profound values of *The Analects of Confucius*, and try to shape students' spiritual qualities and personalities unconsciously, and guide them to form correct moral concepts and life pursuits. We can organize cultural activities such as book clubs and lectures on *The Analects of Confucius* to provide students with a platform for systematic learning and in-depth communication. We also can hold speech competitions, essay contests, Confucian classic recitation conferences, "Analects Culture Festival" and other activities with the theme of *The Analects of Confucius* to further stimulate students' interest and creativity in learning, and continuously deepen their understanding and application of the ideas of *The Analects of Confucius* in the process of cultural practice. Immersive cultural experience activities can be carried out, where college students can compose and perform classical scenes from *The Analects of Confucius*, such as "Confucius travels around various states" (孔子周游列国), "Zilu asks for directions" (子路问津), "Yan Hui is content with poverty and happy to pursue virtues" (颜回安贫乐道), etc. Through immersive role-playing, it is helpful for college students to gain a deeper understanding of the values contained in *The Analects of Confucius*, and thus guide them to adhere to their ideals in the face of material temptations. We can establish Confucian cultural college student

association, carry out traditional rituals such as coming of age ceremony, restore traditional skills such as Rites (礼), Music (乐), Archery (射), Carriage-driving (御), Calligraphy (书), and Mathematics (数), carry out volunteer community service programs, traditional culture teaching and other practical activities, and guide college students to deepen their understanding of the ideological and spiritual connotations of *The Analects of Confucius* in the process of cultural practice. Through embodied experience and innovative expression of cultural activities, it is helpful for college students to transform *The Analects of Confucius* from classical texts into the life experience, so as to internalize it in their hearts and externalize it in actions, and achieve the effect of “nourishing things silently” in ideological and political education.

5.3 Integration into Campus Environment

We can integrate the essence of thoughts from *The Analects of Confucius* into campus cultural development and daily management to achieve a deep fusion of the two. In terms of campus cultural development, thematic cultural walls about *The Analects of Confucius* can be created in high-traffic areas such as teaching buildings, libraries, and student communities. Relevant slogans, sculptures, and bulletin boards can also be set up, with the content presented through artistic forms like calligraphy and seal carving. In this way, daily learning and life scenes are transformed into cultural and educational fields, classical quotes and stories from *The Analects of Confucius* are presented to college students, and they can feel the influence of traditional culture through being immersed in it. Buildings on campus can be named after core concepts from *The Analects of Confucius*, such as “Shendu Building” (慎独楼), which means that don’t relax your demands on yourself in places where others can’t see or hear, or “Sanxing Hall” (三省堂), which means that one may reflect on oneself multiple times a day. In this way, value identification can be conveyed through the dialogue between traditional educational concepts and modern general education. By incorporating educational design and integrating cultural elements into campus landscapes, traditional cultural memories can be revitalized within spatial narratives, creating an immersive educational ecosystem rooted in the essence of *The Analects of Confucius*. In terms of daily student management, the core ideas of *The Analects of Confucius* can be incorporated into students’ behavioral norms and moral standards, guiding them to practice these values in their daily lives and fostering a positive moral ethos and campus atmosphere.

6. Conclusion

The essence of Confucian thought contained in *The Analects of Confucius* is the core component of excellent traditional Chinese culture. By utilizing the “three in one” application model of integration into the ideological and political curriculum system, integration into cultural practice, and integration into campus environment, it is helpful to achieve the deep integration of the ideological essence of *The Analects of Confucius* with ideological and political education in universities. It can be confirmed with certainty that it can not only enhance the cultural depth of ideological and political education in universities, but also activate the contemporary value of excellent traditional culture. While it does

contain some negative and passive elements, the essence of Confucian thought, such as the enterprising spirit of positive progress and self-improvement, a strong sense of historical mission, the lifelong pursuit of serving the state and achieving great accomplishments, has various inspirations for contemporary ideological and political education in universities, and is of great significance for the moral cultivation and personality improvement of contemporary students. This is also precisely indispensable in the construction of modern moral personality today. Only a modern ideal personality built on such a foundation can possess Chinese characteristics.

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