

CONFUCIUS' CONCEPTION OF POLITICAL MAN: CONTENT AND MEANING

Nguyen Phan Thi Thuy Dung^{1,2}

¹ An Giang University, An Giang, Vietnam

² Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Email: np addeddung2008@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Throughout the annals of human intellectual history, Confucius' philosophy, and Confucianism as a whole, emerged as the predominant ideology among the feudal ruling class during the evolution of feudal dynasties across China and numerous other Asian nations, including Vietnam. With a comprehensive system of worldviews, particularly emphasizing societal and individual perspectives within socio-political, moral, and ethical realms, Confucius laid the groundwork for the advancement of Confucianism within the Chinese philosophical tradition. Central to Confucius's teachings was his conception of the human condition, particularly concerning political engagement and ethical conduct. This article employs dialectical materialism and various analytical tools such as comparison, synthesis, historical inquiry, and logical deduction to elucidate Confucius's perspectives on the political individual, characterized by virtues such as benevolence, ceremonial propriety, and the rectification of names. Through this exploration, the author endeavors to illustrate how the Communist Party of Vietnam applies these principles in shaping the contemporary political landscape and fostering virtuous political conduct among its citizens.

Keywords: Confúcio, homem político, conteúdo, Vietname.

A PRÁTICA DA DEMOCRACIA NO VIETNÃ NO CONTEXTO DA ATUAL INTEGRAÇÃO INTERNACIONAL

RESUMO

Ao longo dos anais da história intelectual humana, a filosofia de Confúcio, e o confucionismo como um todo, emergiram como a ideologia predominante entre a classe dominante feudal durante a evolução das dinastias feudais em toda a China e em numerosas outras nações asiáticas, incluindo o Vietname. Com um sistema abrangente de cosmovisões, enfatizando particularmente as perspectivas sociais e individuais nos domínios sócio-políticos, morais e éticos, Confúcio lançou as bases para o avanço do confucionismo dentro da tradição filosófica chinesa. No centro dos ensinamentos de Confúcio estava a sua concepção da condição humana, particularmente no que diz respeito ao envolvimento político e à conduta ética. Este artigo emprega o materialismo dialético e várias ferramentas analíticas, como comparação, síntese, investigação histórica e dedução lógica, para elucidar as perspectivas de Confúcio sobre o indivíduo político, caracterizado por virtudes como a benevolência, a propriedade cerimonial e a retificação de nomes. Através desta exploração, o autor tenta ilustrar como o Partido Comunista do Vietname aplica estes princípios na formação do cenário político contemporâneo e na promoção de uma conduta política virtuosa entre os seus cidadãos.

Palavras-chave: Democracia, integração, internacional, prática, Vietname.



1 INTRODUCTION

Confucianism originated in ancient China under the guidance of Confucius (551 - 479 BC) and was introduced to Vietnam during ancient times. Throughout Vietnamese history, particularly from the 11th to the 19th centuries, Vietnamese feudal dynasties embraced Confucianism as a cornerstone of ideology and governance, while the ruling landlord class utilized its educational principles to mold individuals to their specifications. Confucian philosophy addresses various societal, moral, and ethical issues, with a primary focus on socio-political matters. Confucius laid the groundwork for Confucianism's development within Chinese intellectual history, emphasizing the importance of societal roles and moral conduct, particularly that of the political individual. He conceptualized the "gentleman" as an ideal moral figure, characterized by virtues such as benevolence, ritual propriety, and rectification of names, serving as a standard for evaluating human behavior within society. Despite its conservative tendencies, Confucianism, and Confucius' conception of the political individual, offer enduring value, with contemporary relevance for Vietnam. Particularly in the realm of nurturing morally upright political figures aligned with the ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty, Confucian principles remain pertinent for the ongoing construction and defense of Vietnam's socialist homeland.

In the process of international integration, Vietnam has achieved economic stability and growth through socialist-oriented market policies and increased regional and global integration. However, this period of rapid change has also exposed Vietnamese society to a multitude of foreign cultural influences, risking the erosion of traditional values and national identity. The infiltration of incompatible ideologies and lifestyles threatens the essence and resilience of Vietnamese culture, including its leadership cadre. Confucius' emphasis on social harmony and moral education bears significant implications for maintaining socio-political stability, which forms the foundation for economic progress and societal well-being. Ensuring political stability aligns with the desires of all segments of society and remains imperative for Vietnam's continued development. Therefore, embracing Confucian principles in cultivating morally upright political leaders, characterized by virtues such as benevolence and ritual propriety, is crucial for Vietnam's current socio-political landscape. By doing so, Vietnam can navigate the challenges of cultural exchange while preserving its unique identity and fostering sustainable development in the face of global complexities.

2 METHODS

In this article, the author employs the methodological lens of a philosophy major,



specifically embracing the dialectical materialism approach found in Marxist-Leninist philosophy. Through this method, the author adeptly navigates through the intricate historical perspectives, delving into Confucius' conception of a political figure with a holistic understanding. This entails not only examining Confucius' ideas in isolation but also contextualizing them within the broader landscape of Chinese philosophy, particularly Confucianism.

By adopting a comprehensive viewpoint, the author explores the interconnectedness and lineage of philosophical notions regarding humanity within ancient China, elucidating how Confucius' emphasis on benevolence, ritual propriety, and rectification of names was shaped by the socio-political milieu of the Spring and Autumn period. This nuanced understanding reveals Confucius' pivotal role in shaping Chinese social order amidst tumultuous times. Furthermore, the author applies this historical perspective to contemporary Vietnam, meticulously considering the country's unique circumstances. This contextualization enables the author to demonstrate the relevance and adaptability of Confucian principles in fostering moral values and nurturing political leadership within Vietnam's ongoing industrialization and modernization efforts. Moreover, the author employs a diverse array of research methodologies including comparison, analysis, synthesis, logical deduction, and historical contextualization. Through comparison, the author illuminates both the continuities and divergences between Confucius' ideas and those of contemporaneous Chinese and Indian philosophers, showcasing Confucius' capacity for both inheritance and innovation. Utilizing analytical and synthetic approaches, coupled with logical and historical reasoning, the author systematically elucidates the foundational tenets of Confucius' political philosophy. This rigorous examination not only sheds light on the essence of Confucian thought but also offers insights into its applicability, limitations, and creative potential within modern Vietnamese society.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Contents of Confucius' thought about political man

First of all, the notion of "benevolence" within the context of the political individual warrants exploration. Confucius extensively expounds on the concept of "benevolence" in his political philosophy, as evidenced by its mention a remarkable 109 times in the Analects (Hoang, 2016). Throughout this seminal text, Confucius recurrently emphasizes the significance of "benevolence" in various contexts, revealing its multifaceted nature. At its core, "benevolence" embodies an ethical principle according to Confucius. He posits that



"benevolence" serves as the defining trait of human nature, manifesting itself through acts of "ritual propriety" and "righteousness," thereby governing interpersonal relationships spanning from familial to societal realms (Nguyen, 2006). This ethical category of "benevolence" forms an integral part of Confucian philosophy, harmonizing with other ethical principles to construct a cohesive philosophical system. Consequently, scholars have likened "benevolence" to the central hub within the ethical framework of Confucianism, epitomizing the essence of human nature within this philosophical tradition. Furthermore, "benevolence" extends beyond altruism towards others; it encompasses self-morality as well. Confucius elucidates this aspect by explicating the significance of terms such as "忠" and "恕." He elucidates that a benevolent individual not only aspires to cultivate their own life and aspirations but also endeavors to assist others in their pursuits. In essence, to be loyal and compassionate is to empathize with others' intentions and lend a helping hand (Ly, 2011). Confucius' teachings underscore the golden rule of treating others as one wishes to be treated oneself, emphasizing the importance of reciprocal morality and empathy in fostering harmonious relationships within society. When contrasting Confucius's concept of "benevolence" with the Buddhist notion of compassion, notable distinctions emerge. While Buddha's compassion extends universally to all sentient beings, bearing witness to their suffering with boundless empathy and seeking their liberation from the cycle of existence, Confucianism takes a different approach. Confucian thought aims to cultivate a fulfilling and purposeful life within the confines of this world, prioritizing human happiness and societal harmony over transcendental enlightenment such as nirvana. Consequently, while Buddhist compassion holds a significant place in the spiritual ethos of East Asian societies, it cannot supplant the role of Confucianism, particularly in addressing the human condition and societal welfare. Confucius's "benevolence" emerged within the context of feudal society, imbued with the complexities and nuances of its era. While certain aspects of Confucian thought may no longer directly correspond to contemporary societal structures, extracting its underlying principles remains imperative. Modern society operates within a different framework, necessitating a humanitarian ethos tailored to its specific needs. However, this evolution does not render Confucius's teachings obsolete. Present-day society still grapples with issues of inequality and marginalization, necessitating compassion, empathy, and communal support. Thus, the concept of "benevolence" within Confucian political philosophy retains relevance and efficacy in addressing the challenges of contemporary Vietnamese society.

Secondly, the concept of "propriety" within Confucius's political philosophy. According to Confucius, propriety serves as a moral code governing interpersonal relationships (Ling,



2010). Filial piety towards parents, loyalty to rulers, affection between spouses, respect among siblings, and trust among friends are all exemplifications of this code, which must be adhered to universally. Propriety acts as the societal glue binding individuals to the hierarchical feudal system, as Confucius advocated for its observance from the highest echelons of power down to the common populace.

Confucius attached great importance to propriety due to its role in upholding social order. When propriety is upheld, societal harmony prevails, and rulers are esteemed, facilitating effective governance. Moreover, propriety carries moral significance intertwined with benevolence; virtuous individuals are expected to adhere to propriety dutifully, as it serves as an expression and embodiment of benevolence. Without benevolence, propriety loses its moral essence, rendering it hollow. In its broadest sense, propriety encompasses all societal norms, customs, and habits, serving as a foundational principle of social organization that even extends to legal frameworks. Confucius's perspective on ritual propriety exhibits a dual nature. On one hand, it elevates human dignity by instilling a deep-seated reverence for social norms and customs, fostering a culture of respect and disdain towards those who deviate. Throughout feudal dynasties, adherence to propriety was so ingrained that individuals would rather face death than violate its precepts. This adherence to propriety ensured familial peace and social order amidst the hierarchical structures of feudal societies. However, on the other hand, propriety can stifle societal progress, perpetuating stagnation by rigidly enforcing outdated norms and inhibiting societal evolution.

This dual nature underscores Confucianism's conservative tendencies, which, while understandable in the historical context of social upheaval and competition for power, also reveal its limitations. Nonetheless, these limitations persist in contemporary Eastern societies influenced by Confucian thought, shaping cultural norms and individual behavior to this day. Thus, while acknowledging its historical constraints, there are valuable lessons to glean from Confucianism's emphasis on propriety in fostering social cohesion and governance.

Thirdly, the concept of "rectification of names" within the framework of Confucius's political philosophy. Rectification of names constitutes a foundational principle concerning one's societal role and position. Confucius emphasized that for a gentleman aspiring to "cultivate himself, put a family in order, rule the country, and pacify the world," adherence to the theory of rectification of names is paramount (Xing, 2005). Thus, rectification of names emerges as a crucial element in Confucius's governance doctrine and social organization.

In essence, rectification of names entails ensuring that individuals occupy their rightful



positions and titles within society, thereby averting competition for others' roles. Confucius attributed the chaos of the Spring and Autumn period to the misalignment between individuals' titles and their actions. He asserted that a stable society hinges upon everyone assuming their designated roles and responsibilities correctly. Failure to uphold the principle of rectification of names leads to societal disorder, as articulated in Confucius's cascading logic: incorrect names breed discordant speech, resulting in flawed actions, which undermine the proliferation of music and propriety, ultimately leading to unjust governance. Particularly for rulers, adherence to rectification of names is imperative. The king, as the earthly embodiment of heavenly authority, must epitomize rectitude in his conduct and decisions. Thus, the ruler's first task in governing is to rectify names, delineating the roles and duties of each individual within the state apparatus. Confucius maintained that those who do not occupy their rightful positions cannot properly engage in discussions or reap the benefits associated with those roles (Nguyen, 2006). Rectification of names necessitates self-awareness and a commitment to personal cultivation. Individuals across all societal strata, from the ruler to the commoner, must strive to fulfill their designated roles conscientiously. Confucius emphasized the significance of righteousness and self-awareness in governance, stating that a ruler's authority stems not from coercion but from embodying rectitude. Thus, rectification of names serves as a guiding principle for both individual conduct and effective governance, promoting harmony and order within society.

On the contrary, Confucius's discourse on rectification of names for rulers is deeply rooted in the notion of fulfilling one's designated responsibilities and roles within society. He emphasized the importance of maintaining hierarchical order, where each individual assumes their rightful position: the king as king, the servant as servant, the father as father, and the son as son. Without adherence to these roles, societal hierarchy collapses into chaos, rendering even basic sustenance like rice ineffectual (Le, 2018). Confucius asserted that the efficacy of governance hinges upon the virtue and rectitude of the ruler. A true leader, in Confucian terms, embodies the qualities of a gentleman, prioritizing personal cultivation and virtue. Only by governing their own families with wisdom and compassion can rulers effectively lead the nation. In contemporary terms, this translates to national leadership and social management. A well-governed nation sets an example for the world, fostering peace and stability. Conversely, a corrupt leader lacking virtue loses the trust and obedience of their family, let alone the populace. Such leaders forfeit their legitimacy and moral authority, rendering them unfit to represent their nation on the global stage. Confucius posited that the root cause of societal turmoil lies in the dereliction of duty by the ruling class. Upholding rectification of names entails every individual fulfilling their



obligations and responsibilities diligently. In doing so, society thrives on order, discipline, and prosperity. Confucius admonished against deception, abuse of power, and neglecting one's duties, asserting that rulers must embody benevolence and uphold their responsibilities with integrity. Failure to do so not only jeopardizes their legitimacy but also risks societal stability and harmony. In essence, Confucius's doctrine of rectification of names underscores the symbiotic relationship between personal virtue and effective governance, advocating for ethical leadership and societal order as prerequisites for a flourishing society.

The primary objective of Confucianism's emphasis on rectification of names is indeed social stability. At its core, rectification of names serves to safeguard the hierarchy of society, protecting the rights and status of each individual, including the Son of Heaven. However, it carries not only political ideology but also moral and ethical significance. Rectification of names underscores the importance of fulfilling one's obligations and duties within social relationships, thereby contributing to societal harmony. Human existence is inherently intertwined with various social roles and responsibilities. Confucianism posits that individuals must conscientiously fulfill their obligations within these roles, fostering social stability and cohesion. However, the overemphasis on names can lead to a preoccupation with fame and position, detracting from moral obligations. Confucius's triad of Benevolence, Propriety, and Rectification of Names holds both moral and political significance. These principles form the basis of governance for a gentleman ruler, enabling kindness, tolerance, and disciplined behavior within society. While Benevolence promotes compassion, Propriety establishes hierarchical order through strict regulations, and Rectification of Names clarifies individual responsibilities. Together, they foster a society governed by laws and familial hierarchies, promoting order and discipline. The relationship between these principles is symbiotic: Benevolence forms the foundational content, while Propriety serves as its manifestation. Benevolence guides individuals to uphold moral values, while Propriety delineates their proper conduct within societal roles. Ultimately, Confucius envisioned a feudal society characterized by order, peace, and prosperity, where societal harmony is achieved through the restoration of Rectification of Names.

The meaning of Confucius's thought on political people in the current period

Confucius, as a representative of the old aristocracy, advocated for a political doctrine known as Virtue Rule, aimed at maintaining traditional social and political structures. At the heart of Confucius's political thought lies the concept of cultivating a model ruler, referred to as a gentleman. This ideal figure serves as the linchpin for effective social organization. According to Confucius, individuals aspiring to leadership roles must undergo a rigorous process of self-cultivation before engaging in politics. The journey begins with



personal refinement, followed by the organization of one's family, governance of the state, and ultimately, the pursuit of global peace. This progression underscores the hierarchical nature of Confucian governance, wherein rulers serve as exemplars for societal conduct. Central to Confucius's political-ethical doctrine is the imperative of self-cultivation. Confucius placed great emphasis on educating and refining individuals, particularly those in positions of power, to uphold moral standards and contribute to societal betterment. By instilling virtuous qualities in leaders, Confucius believed they could effectively govern, uplift society, and inspire the populace.

The concept of self-cultivation serves as the cornerstone of Confucius's vision for political leadership. Each individual's commitment to personal growth and moral rectitude lays the groundwork for successful governance and the realization of societal ideals. Thus, Confucius's philosophy on political leadership aimed to cultivate an exemplary model of humanity tailored to the demands of feudal society in its historical context.

Confucius championed the primacy of morality and ethical practice in governance, viewing them as indispensable tools for cultivating an ideal society. Morality, in Confucian thought, held a paramount position, serving as the cornerstone of social stability and the linchpin for achieving collective prosperity. Confucius likened the use of ethics in politics to the North Star, around which all other stars align, emphasizing its central role in guiding governance. Confucius underscored the efficacy of moral education in shaping individual behavior from an early age, steering them toward virtuous conduct and away from wrongdoing. While acknowledging the importance of laws, Confucianism primarily emphasized morality as the primary governing principle. However, Confucius recognized the necessity of law in maintaining societal order, particularly in a chaotic environment. The hierarchical structure prescribed by Confucianism from soldiers to servants, fathers to sons required a legal framework to ensure adherence to societal norms. Confucianism advocates for the judicious use of punishment alongside moral education. While Confucius prioritized morality, he acknowledged the role of punishment as a temporary measure to deter wrongdoing. However, he cautioned against its overuse, emphasizing that true societal harmony and submission stem from moral enlightenment rather than fear of punishment.

In essence, Confucianism synthesizes morality and law as complementary elements in governance. While morality forms the bedrock of societal order and virtue, laws serve as a necessary tool for maintaining hierarchy and deterring transgressions. Confucianism's emphasis on moral education and ethical practice underscores its enduring influence on the political landscape of imperial China and beyond.

The preceding discourse elucidates that due to historical context and societal



constraints, certain conservative and antiquated aspects persist in Confucius's conception of the political individual. Nonetheless, upon transcending these limitations, the essence of Confucius's teachings regular cultivation of morality, emphasis on moral education, adept family governance, and nurturing the populace remains profoundly relevant in contemporary society. However, to extract value from Confucian thought, it is imperative to approach these ideas with a fresh perspective, eschewing mere repetition of antiquated dogmas. Confucius's doctrine on the political individual not only underscores the moral dimension of human development but also posits it as a potent means for societal stability and progress. Indeed, Confucius bequeathed a wealth of moral principles and practices. As Ho Chi Minh aptly noted, while certain aspects of Confucianism may be incongruent with modernity, discerning individuals can glean invaluable insights from its corpus.

In considering Confucius's moral content, several enduring tenets merit inheritance. Foremost among these is Benevolence, which constitutes a cornerstone of Confucian ethics. Benevolence emanates from genuine love and concern for others, with filial piety serving as its foundational element. Confucius extols the virtues of selfless dedication and sacrifice for the well-being of others, without expectation of reciprocity. His conception of Benevolence transcends the compassion espoused in Buddhism and the moderation advocated in Christianity. While both religions emphasize benevolence, Confucius's nuanced approach emphasizes prioritizing familial and ethnic bonds while extending kindness to all. In essence, Confucius's teachings on Benevolence resonate deeply in their realism and depth, offering profound insights into human morality and ethical conduct. By discerning and incorporating these timeless principles into contemporary ethical frameworks, society can cultivate a more compassionate and harmonious ethos grounded in the enduring wisdom of the past.

Self-cultivation stands as the cornerstone of Confucius's conception of the political individual. Contrary to the notion of innate morality bestowed by a divine entity, Confucius posited that an individual's character and ethics are shaped through their own deliberate efforts and training. This principle extends beyond societal hierarchies and national borders, embodying a universal human ethos. Confucius emphasized that self-cultivation is imperative for individuals across all societal strata, from the highest echelons of power to the common populace. This transcendence of class distinctions underscores the progressive nature of Confucius's thought, elevating it to a timeless and universal principle. At its core, Confucian self-cultivation entails the refinement of personal morality. Ho Chi Minh recognized the intrinsic value of Confucian doctrine in fostering individual moral development. Education plays a pivotal role in this process, equipping individuals with the discernment to distinguish between right and wrong. Moral behavior nurtures harmonious



relationships within families and communities, fostering cohesion and societal well-being. Central to self-cultivation is the cultivation of compassion and love, beginning with familial bonds and extending outward to encompass broader social circles. Each individual is tasked with adhering to ritual propriety and behaving in accordance with their societal role. Superiors must exemplify moral character for their subordinates, while subordinates must demonstrate loyalty and filial piety. Daily self-criticism forms an integral aspect of self-cultivation, enabling individuals to reflect on their actions and strive for continuous improvement. Through this introspective practice, individuals identify areas for growth, rectify mistakes, and strive for excellence in moral conduct. In essence, Confucius's doctrine of self-cultivation champions the cultivation of personal morality as a foundational principle for societal harmony and individual fulfillment. By embracing this ethos of self-improvement and ethical refinement, individuals contribute to the cultivation of a virtuous and harmonious society.

Self-cultivation, as envisaged in Confucius's philosophy of the political individual, serves as a pivotal gauge for moral development, offering numerous principles applicable to contemporary society. It entails the continuous refinement of one's character and conduct in accordance with the principles of propriety and moral obligation. Self-cultivation encompasses moral growth, education, and introspection a journey of self-discovery, behavioral regulation, and personal actualization. Nevertheless, the legacy of Confucius's doctrine of self-cultivation necessitates careful selection, supplementation, and adaptation to suit the demands of the modern era. A significant drawback of Confucius's concept of self-cultivation lies in its exclusive focus on moral and interpersonal development, overlooking the imperative of scientific literacy, technological proficiency, and cognitive enhancement in today's world. In essence, while Confucius's philosophy offers invaluable insights into moral cultivation and personal refinement, it requires augmentation to encompass a broader spectrum of human development. By integrating moral growth with scientific knowledge, technological proficiency, and cognitive advancement, individuals can cultivate a more comprehensive and adaptive approach to self-improvement, thereby fostering personal fulfillment and contributing to the progress of society.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Vietnam is currently charting its path along the socialist road, a social model characterized by people's ownership and participation. While unprecedented in history, this socio-economic model faces numerous challenges, necessitating collective efforts from all segments of society and the entire Party to advance the nation. However, the



present reality presents concerning trends. The pitfalls of the market economy have left many individuals disoriented, struggling to discern the societal ideal. This issue is particularly acute among some cadres who have succumbed to political degradation, moral decline, and the abuse of power for personal gain, resulting in corruption, wastefulness, and factionalism. These deviations from the revolutionary ethos of serving the people and the nation highlight the urgent need to reinforce the education of correct political ideals and moral values such as benevolence, propriety, and rectification of names, as advocated by Confucius. Confucius' conceptualization of the political individual continues to hold relevance in contemporary society, albeit requiring adaptation to current circumstances. While Confucius primarily emphasized the aspiration for bureaucratic roles, modern society offers diverse avenues for contribution and service beyond officialdom. Fields such as science, technology, production, and business demand talent and dedication, extending beyond the limited scope of bureaucratic positions. Therefore, embracing the ideals of service to the people and the nation entails a broad spectrum of responsibilities and opportunities for meaningful contribution. In essence, while Confucius' political ideals provide valuable insights, their application must evolve to suit the complexities of modern society. Upholding the spirit of dedication to the people and the nation entails a commitment to a diverse range of endeavors, ensuring continued progress and prosperity for Vietnam.

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