

# RESEARCH ON THE PATH OF INTEGRATING CONFUCIAN ETHICAL THOUGHTS INTO COLLEGE STUDENTS' MORAL EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** *As an important part of Chinese excellent traditional culture, Confucian ethical thoughts can promote the development of traditional culture and modern education by integrating it into moral education. Confucian ethical thoughts can help to excavate the humanistic spirits and values in traditional culture, and at the same time, they are combined with the goals and needs of modern education to provide enlightenment for contemporary education. In view of this, this paper expounds the main contents of Confucian ethical thoughts, analyzes the problems existing in the integration of Confucian ethical thoughts into college students' moral education, and puts forward that it is of great importance to play the role of curriculum education, cultural education, practical education and network education, and promote Confucian ethical thoughts into the classroom, practice platform and cyberspace to promote the overall and effective improvement of college students' moral education.*

**Keywords:** *Confucian Ethical Thoughts; College Students; Moral Education*

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## Introduction

In society today, the importance of moral education becomes increasingly visible. As the core of Chinese excellent traditional culture, Confucian ethical thoughts are rich in moral education resources, which is of positive significance for developing college students' moral quality and humanistic quality. Confucian ethical thoughts emphasize the core values of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity, which are of great guiding significance to the moral education of college students. By integrating Confucian ethical thoughts into classroom teaching, campus culture and social practice, college students can better understand Chinese excellent traditional culture and their social responsibility. Relevant literature show that the integration of Confucian ethical thoughts into college students' moral education mainly has the following significance:

First, the society pays less and less attention to the moral education of college students. Since the 1970s and 1980s, the rapid development of science and technology has led to a tendency to downplay moral cultivation of college students at all levels of society, and even the concept of "value free" has emerged. The most direct consequence of this tendency is a decline in college students' values education. Ma-Jiajue case(Cha Ying & Lu Siyan, 2004), Lin Haosen case (CCTV, 2013), Wu Xieyu case(Zhang Sunchuan, 2016) and cases of cruelty to animals (The Paper, 2023) make all walks of life begin to pay attention to the moral education of college students, which leads to thinking about how to promote moral education.

Second, the current situation of college students' moral education is not optimistic. College students are the backbone of the future society. The moral quality of college students directly affects the healthy development of their body and mind and the progress of society (Liu Xinqiang & Li Xueming, 2004). However, at present, there are still some problems in college students' moral education. In colleges and universities, the education mode of taking exam-oriented education as the core and paying too much attention to students' test scores, while putting moral education in a secondary position, has led to the weakening of the educational function of colleges and universities. Socially, with the acceleration of economic globalization and informatization, multiculturalism has an increasing influence on college students, especially under the influence of individualism and pragmatism, some college students' values have undergone subtle changes. The idea of abandoning Chinese excellent traditional culture and excessively pursuing individual interests while ignoring collective interests is becoming more and more common among college students. In addition, students are more dependent on their families, and are arrogant. They only consider themselves, ignore collective interests, and lack the ability of self-restraint and control, which also leads to the decline of the whole social morals.

Third, Confucian ethical thoughts are of great significance to college students' moral education. Confucian ethical thoughts are based on moral education and covers ideological contents such as world outlook, outlook on life, values and political views (Huang Zhao, 2006). From this, we can generally understand that Confucian ethical thoughts mainly refer to the systematic ideological ideas, contents, methods and principles formed by Confucian scholars in moral education. Any theory has its specific theoretical basis, and there is a solid basis for the integration of Confucian ethical thoughts and moral education. At the same time, the integration of the two has practical necessity and feasibility. As an important part of Chinese excellent traditional culture, Confucian excellent ethics contains the contents, concepts, principles and methods of moral education, which has unique moral education value. At present, the integration of excellent Confucian ethical thoughts into college students' moral education can

enrich the educational content and broaden the educational ideas for moral education. It is not only an inevitable choice to complete the fundamental task of cultivating people by virtue, but also an important channel to improve college students' moral education, and it is also the proper meaning to inherit and carry forward Chinese excellent traditional culture.

## Related Concepts

### Confucian Ethical Thoughts

Du Weiming believes that the benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity that a person should pursue are important principles of personal moral development, which shows the mutual care between people. Wu Guang (1998) divided Confucian ethical thoughts into three parts. The first is the system of virtue principles; The second is the system of ethical principles; The third is the system of self-cultivation principles. The principle of virtue refers to the basic moral principles. The most fundamental and universal moral principle is benevolence. Ethical principle refers to the principles and etiquette system that regulate interpersonal relationships and distinguish social classes with propriety as the core. The principle of self-cultivation includes a set of related principles for perfecting virtue. Sun Yongtai et al.(2005) believed that the core content of Confucian ethical thoughts can be roughly divided into three parts, namely, the core spirit, social ethical values and code of conduct. The core spirit of Confucian ethical thoughts is benevolence, emphasizing love, respect and care for others. The social ethical values include principle of feudal moral conduct, family-oriented idea, loyalty, and filial piety. Code of conduct involves the general code of conduct for people in daily life, such as righteousness, wisdom, propriety, tolerance and so on. Liu Yuli(2009) proposed that benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity are the core of Confucian ethical thoughts, which are related personal morality and norms of human relations. Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity runs through the development of Chinese ethics and becomes the core factor in China's value system. Lu Kaidong et al.(2005) pointed out that Confucianism is a kind of life attitude and philosophy, and its self-restraint idea and benevolence are helpful to the moral education of contemporary college students. Colleges should pay attention to the benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity, strengthen students' moral education, and guide students to correct their outlook on life, world outlook and values.

Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity are the core of Confucian ethical thoughts, which are related to personal morality and the norms of human relations. Mencius initially put forward the four basic ethical norms of benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom, and Dong Zhongshu added fidelity in the Western Han Dynasty. The five ethical norms run through the development of Chinese ethics and become the core in China's value system. Drawing on the opinions of the above scholars, the Confucian ethical thoughts in this study mainly refers to the five basic ethical norms of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity.

### Moral Education for College Students

The definition of moral education has long been controversial in Chinese academic circles. What is moral education? In short, it aims to develop students' moral quality. However, what is the meaning of morality? What kind of education can be regarded as moral education for students? The specific understanding and definition of morality, from different perspectives, often leads to no conclusions. Different definitions of moral education are the reflection of different moral education views, and have different influences on moral education practice.

Howard Kirschenbaum(1994) defined moral education as a conscious attempt to help others acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that can make life satisfactory and have positive social significance. Thomas Rikner (2001) put forward that moral education refers to an education based on schools and carried out in cooperation with community organizations, which help students form good habits and health behaviors. Wang Fengyan(2005) pointed out that moral education is different from moral work, which mainly refers to moral education in a narrow sense and is a systematic activity for educators to develop the moral quality of the educated. Educators should pay attention to the law of the formation and development of moral quality, and adopt reasonable means to promote the moral development of the educated according to the needs of society and individuals. Gu mingyuan(1990) explained in his *Dictionary of Education* that moral education is an education that enables the educated to have certain moral qualities. Hu Qiaomu(1993) defined moral education as educators exert systematic influence on the educated in a purposeful, planned and organized way according to the requirements of a certain society or class, and transform certain social thoughts and morals into education in the first edition of *Encyclopedia of China*.

### **Importance of Integrating Confucian Ethical Thoughts into Contemporary College Students' Moral Education**

#### **It Is Conducive to Building Cultural Soft Power and Enhancing Cultural Self-Confidence.**

For a country, culture is an important part of its soft power, as important as its hard power. Under the background of globalization, it is particularly critical for culture to keep pace with the times. Confucian ethical thoughts, as the cultural treasure of the Chinese nation, provides us with rich moral education resources, which is an asset that we can continuously utilize in moral education. Integrating Confucian ethical thoughts into the moral education of contemporary college students will not only help to inherit and carry forward China's excellent traditional culture, but also improve college students' recognition and understanding of traditional culture, thus enhancing their cultural self-confidence. However, in the process of integration, it is necessary to adopt a critical attitude, neither blindly accepting it all, nor criticizing it unconditionally. We need to look at Confucian ethical thoughts from a dialectical perspective and distinguish the essence from the dross. For those parts that are divorced from modern society and may lead to ideological shackles, it is necessary to eliminate and transform them. At the same time, innovative transformation of Confucian ethical thoughts can be carried out, so that it can adapt to the moral education of contemporary college students.

#### **It Is Conducive to Promoting Social Morality and Building a Harmonious Society.**

Social morality is the most basic part of social moral system, which is related to social harmony and the moral quality of citizens. As an important group of the society, college students also affect the social morality. Therefore, Confucian ethical thoughts should be re-examined and understood to better meet the ethical requirements of modern society. There are many valuable contents in Confucian ethical thoughts, such as kindness, loyalty and etiquette, which are important resources for the development of social morality. However, we must also realize that some concepts in Confucian ethical thoughts may not be completely consistent with modern social morality. Therefore, Confucian ethical thoughts should be reconstructed and innovated properly, so that it can be integrated with the moral education in modern society. Specifically, it is necessary to consider the requirements of modern moral education of college students, and guide students to establish correct moral norms and values. At the same time, it is also needed

to let college students understand the importance of social morality in practice, so as to improve their moral quality.

### **It Is Conducive to Improving the Moral Quality of College Students.**

If college students want to be excellent people, they should not only have professional knowledge, but also have good moral literacy. Colleges should give full play to good values and help them to foster ideals. For example, the idea of "in poverty, one should still hold himself to a high standard; in prosperity, one should contribute to the wellbeing of all" will help improve the moral quality of college students. College students can use this idea to decide their own life path. As long as everyone can consciously adhere to this idea, they can drive people around them to become more moral. If everyone can consciously adhere to this idea, a harmonious atmosphere will be formed on campus. "Paying attention to righteousness" puts forward a pioneering view on the relationship between profit and righteousness for college students, which will help to plant excellent spirit in their hearts.

### **Main Problems of Integrating Confucian Ethical Thoughts into the Moral Education of Contemporary College Students**

#### **Lack of Courses Related to Confucian Ethical Thoughts**

Moral education course teaching in colleges and universities is an important way to improve college students' moral quality, but there are some problems in actual teaching. First, the teaching content is less related to traditional culture. This leads to college students' lack of interest in the course, thinking that the teaching content is out of touch with their majors and lives. Second, there is a lack of excavation of excellent examples around students in teaching, and there is a lack of guidance. Students may understand the truth in class, but it is difficult to turn theory into practice. Therefore, it is an urgent issue to integrate Confucian ethical thoughts into teaching and improve the effectiveness of moral education. First, the teaching content needs to be more integrated with traditional culture and Confucian ethical thoughts, so that students can learn moral wisdom from it. Second, teachers need to pay attention to excellent examples, so that students can understand the role of morality. In addition, teachers should also pay attention to practice guide students to apply what they have learned to real life, and improve their moral literacy.

#### **Deficiencies in the Cultural Environment of Campus**

Under the background of globalization, the rapid development of network technology makes it easy for college students to obtain information. However, college students are in the critical period of the formation of psychological and moral concepts, and their minds are not yet fully mature, so they are easy to get lost. Although colleges and universities set a clear principle of fostering virtue through education, there is still much room for improvement in campus cultural environment. First, campus activities are insufficient, especially the quantity and quality of student associations related to Confucian culture need to be improved. Second, some college students are affected by utilitarianism. This poses a challenge to the spread of Confucian ethical thoughts. In addition, the poor campus cultural environment is also a big problem. Colleges and universities have unique educational resources, but there is still a lot of work to be done in how to use these resources to promote Confucian ethical thoughts and moral education. For example, through lectures, seminars, cultural festivals and other forms, students can have a deeper understanding of Confucian culture, thus improving their moral quality.



### **The Teaching Form Is Simple, and the Theory and Practice Are Not Closely Combined.**

Confucianism pays attention to the unity of knowing and doing. Only by integrating theory with practice can students better understand Confucianism, and at the same time nurture a sense of identity. First of all, the current college moral education courses are divorced from the actual needs of college students, and the teaching content is simple and repetitive, and the theory is boring. Some students regard the course a way to get credit. To get high marks, they recite theories desperately. Some students simply ignore it, as long as they can pass the exam. Second, there are not many teachers who are well acquainted with Confucian ethical thought. At the undergraduate stage, there are few theoretical courses and practical courses, and some universities do not even have related courses. Fourth, colleges pay too much attention to the theoretical courses. In the moral education of modern college students, it is very necessary to integrate Confucian morality with moral education.

### **Path of Integrating Confucian Ethical Thoughts into the Moral Education of Contemporary College Students**

#### **Play the Role of Curriculum Education, and Bring Confucian Ethical Thoughts into the Ideological and Political Classroom.**

The most important thing for promoting moral education in colleges and universities is to arouse the enthusiasm of teachers. Fostering virtue through education is a foothold of moral education in colleges and universities. Teachers should take their responsibilities. Classroom teaching is an important part of moral education for students. If colleges want to make full use of this main channel and carry out moral education, they need to put forward higher requirements for teachers. Teachers should strengthen the study on Confucian ethical thoughts, improve their cultural awareness and cultural self-confidence, integrate Confucian ethical thoughts into the teaching content, keep it in line with the development of the times, combine the essence of Confucian ethical thoughts with Marxist theory, and innovate teaching methods, so as to improve the teaching quality and effect. In addition, some adjustments should be made in the selection of teaching materials. For example, in the fifth chapter of *Ideology, Morality and Legal System*, the role of Confucian moral thoughts is discussed, so it can be used to enhance the confidence of young students.

#### **Give Play to the Role of Culture in Educating People and Intergrate Confucian Ethical Thoughts with Campus Culture.**

It is of great significance to arm students with Confucian moral concepts and create a harmonious campus environment. As the places to develop high-quality talents, colleges can not only influence students, but also shape them. Moral education in colleges and universities is closely related to campus cultural environment. The campus environment includes not only natural environment, but also classroom environment, network environment and learning environment. Colleges should build a good and healthy campus cultural environment, and incorporate Confucian moral concepts into the school culture. It is also necessary to give full play to the advantages of various resources of the colleges to establish a moral education system for students. For example, carry out cultural activities between colleges, create an atmosphere of learning traditional culture, and establish cultural exchange centers in schools, so that students can have a strong interest in traditional culture. At the same time, colleges should consider the conditions of students, strengthen moral education, and hold forums to make students mentally active. In the internet age, social media may help to create a good social environment and provide positive guidance to college students.

### **Give Play to the Role of Practical Education, and Integrate Confucian Ethical Thoughts with the Practice Platform.**

Confucianism attaches importance to practice, advocates practice, and holds that only practice is the only criterion for testing truth. Confucianism pays attention to the realization of virtue. Confucianism also pays great attention to reality. Confucius believed that a gentleman should aim at saving the people, so as to achieve the goal of cultivating morality for the common people. Colleges should attach importance to the application of Confucian ethical thoughts and create a good moral education environment. Students can make regular self-assessment of their moral quality, actively participate in social practice, and understand society more comprehensively. Students should start pay attention to their words, in the long run, they will get great progress. In addition, it is necessary to link all kinds of moral education activities with the outside world. Through a series of social practice activities, colleges can test college students' moral knowledge.

### **Play the Role of Network Education, and Place Confucian Ethical Thoughts into Cyberspace.**

With the rapid development of the Internet, the minds of contemporary college students have gradually matured. The Internet and other media can be adopted to present Confucian ethical thoughts in a vivid and interesting way, avoiding relying too much on theoretical courses. For example, media platforms such as WeChat and WeChat official accounts should be used to educate college students. A propaganda group of Confucian ethical thoughts for college students can be set up to conduct research on Confucian moral thought. At the same time, books and practical examples can also be used to play an exemplary role. Teachers can talk about the current hot issues, so that students can have a deeper understanding of Confucian moral concepts. In addition, colleges should also give full play to the influence of social events, and actively apply the Confucian ethical thoughts to the new media, so that college students can understand and effectively apply the Confucian ethical thoughts in their daily life, and restrain their daily behavior at any time.

### **Conclusion**

Among the treasures of Chinese excellent traditional culture, Confucian ethical thoughts provide valuable resources for college students' moral education with its profound connotation and values. By integrating Confucian ethical thoughts with moral education, college students can better understand Chinese excellent traditional culture and develop their noble moral sentiments. In this study, the path of integrating Confucian ethical thoughts into college students' moral education is explored, and practical strategies are put forward. These strategies are helpful to guide college students to deeply understand Confucian ethical thoughts and become talents with noble moral sentiments and strong sense of social responsibility. However, the integration of Confucian ethical thoughts into college students' moral education is a long and complicated process, which requires the joint efforts of all parties. Colleges and universities should attach importance to the inheritance and development of Chinese excellent traditional culture, strengthen the construction of moral education courses, and improve teachers' cultural literacy. At the same time, all sectors of society should also pay attention to the important role of Confucian ethical thoughts and jointly create a good cultural atmosphere. In the future, it is expected to see more research on Confucian ethical thoughts and moral education for college students, perfecting relevant theoretical systems and providing more practical methods. This will not only promote the development of moral education in colleges and universities, but also make contributions to the prosperity of education.

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