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Ideal personality of Confucian thoughts and its contemporary relevance for education

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Abstract: Amidst significant transformations in both domestic and international contexts, as well as profound changes in China's economy and society, numerous challenges persist in the realm of social morality, with social values becoming increasingly pluralistic. This paper seeks to examine the historical evolution of the connotation of the Confucian ideal of personality, explore its contemporary relevance and practical applications, and provide theoretical support for the creative transformation and innovative development of China's rich traditional culture. By doing so, it aims to contribute to the enrichment and refinement of the core socialist values with Chinese characteristics, offer a cultural foundation for these endeavors, and propose an ideal personality model aligned with contemporary requirements to strengthen the moral construction of citizens. Drawing from the theories of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi on the ideal of personality, this paper delves into the historical evolution of the Confucian concept of ideal personality, with a particular focus on the theoretical interpretation of the principle of being "inner sagehood and outer kingship". It systematically traces the historical development of Confucian personality theory, highlights the alignment between traditional Chinese cultural values and the core values of socialism, and investigates the integration of Confucian ideals of personality with the practical demands of contemporary civic morality.

Keywords: confucian personality ideal; inner sagehood and outer kingship; civic morality; socialist core values; global sustainability

1. Introduction

Confucianism has profoundly shaped Chinese society's mentality and values, influencing both historical and contemporary perspectives on morality, governance, and social harmony throughout history and in contemporary times [1]. Historically, Confucianism emphasized ideals such as *ren* (benevolence), *li* (ritual propriety), and *xiao* (filial piety), which became core ethical principles guiding personal behavior and social relationships [2]. These values encouraged respect for hierarchy, loyalty to family and state, and an emphasis on self-cultivation, hence establishing a framework for social order that persisted through successive dynasties. In contemporary China, Confucian ideals continue to resonate and provide cultural continuity amid rapid modernization and globalization [3]. The concepts of collective responsibility, respect for education, and moral leadership remain embedded in Chinese society, influencing policies that promote social stability and cohesion. Additionally, Confucianism's emphasis on harmony and ethical governance aligns with current efforts to balance economic growth with social welfare, reflecting its enduring relevance in shaping the mentality and values of the Chinese people today [4].

In the context of globalization, it is particularly vital to uphold cultural self-confidence and national self-confidence, thereby reinforcing the cultural foundation

for socialist construction. As a pivotal ideological source of traditional Chinese culture, Confucianism offers valuable insights into the essence of Chinese culture, providing fertile cultural ground for the Sinicization of Marxism. It also facilitates the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional culture through an in-depth examination of the evolving ideas on personality ideals in the philosophies of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi. Such efforts serve as a spiritual impetus for achieving the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation [5]. The theories of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi concerning the ideal personality represent a significant component of China's rich cultural heritage and constitute an ideological foundation for the core values of contemporary Chinese socialism. These theories offer practical guidance for cultivating citizens who embody social morality, professional ethics, family virtues, and personal virtues in the new era. Amid profound changes in the international and domestic landscape, as well as significant economic and social transformations, the study of Confucian ideals of personality has become increasingly relevant. This importance is further underscored by existing inadequacies in the rules, policies, and regulations of the market economy and social governance systems.

Presently, numerous challenges persist in the moral domain, including diversified social values, serious moral anomalies in certain areas, and a lack of clarity or even absence of moral principles among some societal members. Addressing these issues necessitates an in-depth exploration of Confucian theories on personality ideals. Such studies enable the absorption of the finest achievements of traditional ethical thought, the development of a contemporary ideal personality model, and the promotion of civic morality construction. They also contribute to strengthening ideological and political education in colleges and universities, fostering a societal ethos aligned with the practice of core socialist values, and cultivating socialist builders and successors equipped to shoulder the responsibilities of the times [6,7].

This paper examines the evolution of the Confucian ideal of personality through the theories of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi, with particular emphasis on the concept of being “inner sagehood and outer kingship”. It systematically traces the historical development of Confucian personality theory, elucidates the ideological congruence between traditional Chinese culture and socialist core values, and investigates the integration of Confucian ideals of personality with contemporary civic moral practices.

2. Understanding the essence of the Confucian ideal of personality through Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi

2.1. Confucius: Cultivating virtuous and capable *junzi* who are worthy of bearing the important responsibilities of governance and statecraft

Confucius once said, “A sage—I cannot hope to meet one; I would be content to meet a *junzi*” (The Analects, translated by the authors). He further defined the *junzi*, or “gentleman”/“noble person” as one who “speaks with loyalty and sincerity, harbors no resentment, embodies benevolence and righteousness, shows humility without arrogance, and pursues clear thinking without being dogmatic. With steadfast action

and unyielding self-improvement, he seems attainable yet remains beyond reach” (Kongzi Jiayu, Wuyi Jie, translated by the authors). In Confucian thought, the sage is someone endowed with innate wisdom who has attained the highest levels of moral virtue—a supreme ideal and ultimate goal for Confucian personality development [8]. While theoretically achievable, this sage-like state remains a challenging ideal for most people, serving as a moral aspiration rather than a practical expectation. However, according to Confucius, a *junzi* is a more attainable role, one that can be realized through education and self-cultivation [9]. For Confucius, the pathway of self-cultivation, family governance, statecraft, and world harmony represents the *junzi*’s path of inner virtue and public service, cultivating individuals of moral integrity for leadership and governance [10]. In Confucius’ time, the term *junzi* held dual meanings: it referred both to rulers and to individuals of moral refinement and practical competence, with Confucius often favoring the latter. His educational aim was to cultivate students as *junzi* rather than “petty people,” instructing them to aspire to the noble ideal of the *junzi* as a manifestation of Confucian moral character.

When asked what defines a *junzi*, Confucius would likely point to two fundamental attributes: commitment to righteousness (*yi*) and acceptance of destiny (*zhi ming*). For a *junzi*, *yi* represents the pursuit of moral actions that benefit oneself and society, while *zhi ming* reflects a transcendent understanding of one’s place in the world. Righteousness asserts one’s moral standing and dignity, whereas accepting destiny represents a humble openness to the vastness and diversity of the world. Confucius also articulated the “three core virtues” of the *junzi*: benevolence (*ren*), wisdom (*zhi*), and courage (*yong*). A *junzi* embodies a benevolent heart that brings peace of mind, insightful knowledge to navigate life without confusion, and the courage to act with boldness and fortitude. These virtues collectively form the foundation of the *junzi*’s character and aim to foster a harmonious blend of mind and body, moral principles, and action.

The spirit of the *junzi* manifests in four dimensions: conviction in moral ideals, a compassionate disposition, a sense of responsibility, and a commitment to action. These dimensions collectively guide the *junzi*’s path from understanding to practical application. *Ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (ritual propriety), *zhi* (wisdom), loyalty (*zhong*), integrity (*xin*), courage (*yong*), the middle way (*zhongyong*), harmony, and balanced refinement are the ten core values that encapsulate the *junzi* personality. Confucius and early Confucians carefully distinguished between the *junzi* and the “petty person”, aiming to foster an ideal personality grounded in benevolence. According to Confucius, *ren* serves as the foundation of the *junzi*’s character, and all other traits build upon this virtue, encompassing love, loyalty, and self-improvement.

A *junzi* is expected to balance both inner integrity and outward grace, exemplifying “refinement through ritual” and harmonious living. Confucius also saw resilience as essential to the *junzi*’s character, as captured in the expression, “The path of Heaven is vigorous, and a *junzi* must strive ceaselessly” (*I Ching*, translated by the authors). Thus, the *junzi* personifies an independent personality with qualities of kindness, respect, tolerance, self-discipline, and determination—a holistic, harmonious model of character, embodying Confucian ideals of moral cultivation and social harmony.

Ultimately, for Confucius, the *junzi* represents the ideal personality, embodying both righteousness and acceptance of destiny, the virtues of benevolence, wisdom, and courage, and the four qualities of commitment, compassion, responsibility, and perseverance. With these traits, the *junzi* stands as a model of Confucian moral thought and a realization of Confucian ethical aspirations.

2.2. Mencius: Cultivating a noble and righteous spirit to become a person of strong moral resolve and integrity

Han Yu, in his high regard for Mencius, proclaimed “To seek the Way of the Sage, one must begin with Mencius” (translated by the authors), asserting that Mencius fully inherited Confucius’s teachings, and that the revival of the Sage’s Way should commence with a study of Mencius. Mencius not only continued and expanded upon Confucius’s ideas of the ideal personality but also proposed the cultivation of the *dàzhàngfū* (true gentleman) with “vast, unyielding spirit” (*hao ran zhi qi*), enriching and advancing Confucian theory on ideal character [11]. This contribution helped shape the foundational ideals and values of the Chinese national character.

Mencius’ theory of innate goodness (*xing shan*) forms the cornerstone of his approach to personality development. He stated: “The heart of compassion is the beginning of benevolence; the heart of shame is the beginning of righteousness; the heart of respect and yielding is the beginning of propriety; and the heart of discernment between right and wrong is the beginning of wisdom” (Mencius, Gong Sun Chou I). Unlike Confucius’ era, which did not focus extensively on human nature, Mencius’ era saw a deeper exploration of human goodness and evil, with the doctrine of inherent goodness becoming the foundation of his theories on personal cultivation and development. Mencius argued that the qualities of compassion, shame, respect, and discernment are innate to all humans, forming the basis of humanity’s essential goodness. This inherent goodness, as an internal moral endowment, is a potential that can be sought, controlled, and actualized independently of external conditions, embodying the freedom of human will [12]. Although it may be obscured by external influences, goodness can be recovered through self-cultivation, moral refinement, and the “seeking of the lost mind,” thereby restoring one’s original, virtuous nature. These principles form the theoretical foundation for Mencius’ ideal of the *dàzhàngfū* personality.

The core of Mencius’ ideal personality centers on the integration of *ren* (benevolence) and *yi* (righteousness). *Ren* and *yi* permeate all aspects of Mencius’ thought: they derive from humanity’s innate conscience, serve as principles of governance in Mencius’ ideal of benevolent rule, and guide ethical conduct in daily life. Building on Confucius’ emphasis on *ren*, Mencius advocated for an ideal personality defined by the balance of *ren* and *yi*, prioritizing them as the standards by which one should live. Mencius declared, “*Ren* is the heart of humanity, and *yi* is the path of humanity” (Mencius, Li Lou I), suggesting that *ren* reflects the intrinsic spirit of humanity, while *yi* represents the path one must follow. This principle of “abiding in *ren* and following *yi*” embodies the unity of these virtues. For Mencius, *ren*, the love for others, is the foundation of human interactions, and *yi* is the moral guide for deciding what one should or should not do. The principle of *ren* and *yi* thus extends

from familial affection to society at large, establishing the foundation of Mencius' vision of the *dàzhàngfū* as an ideal personality model.

Mencius set the *dàzhàngfū*, or true gentleman, as the aspirational goal for personality cultivation. In Mencius, Teng Wen Gong II, he provides a vivid description of the *dàzhàngfū*: “He resides in the vastness of the world, upholds righteousness, and follows the Way. When in power, he guides others; when not, he holds steadfast to his own path. Wealth cannot corrupt him, poverty cannot sway him, and power cannot bend him. This is the true gentleman” (translated by the authors). Here, Mencius captures the *dàzhàngfū*'s values, attitude toward life, and moral resilience. With his doctrine of human goodness, emphasis on *ren* and *yi*, and disregard for external norms like ritual (*li*), Mencius critiqued those who pursue selfish interests, advocating instead for the virtues of *ren* and *yi* as guiding values and condemning the self-centered “petty man”. The *dàzhàngfū*, as Mencius' model of ideal personality, is sustained by *haoran zhi qi*—not merely a concept or theoretical principle, but a state of being cultivated through disciplined self-cultivation. This noble spirit encapsulates the life-state and moral fortitude required of the *dàzhàngfū*, with the aim of nurturing this ideal personality through the steady cultivation of *haoran zhi qi*.

2.3. Xunzi: A refined scholar capable of governing a vast realm, a great sage to whom all under heaven turn

In the words of Xunzi: “If a ruler employs ordinary people, a state with ten thousand chariots will perish; if he employs conventional scholars, the state will survive. If he employs refined scholars, a state with a thousand chariots will be stable; if he employs a great scholar, even a territory of merely a hundred miles will endure, and after three years, the realm will be unified, and all feudal lords will become his subjects. If a ten-thousand-chariot state is led by a great scholar, it will swiftly rise to dominance” (Xunzi, The Effects of Confucian Scholars). This passage asserts that while employing conventional scholars can preserve a nation, it does not bring stability, distinguishing them from ordinary people who may lead the state to ruin. Stability implies peace and security, something conventional scholars cannot achieve. In contrast, refined scholars can bring stability to a larger state, while great scholars can unify the world, subduing feudal lords. A ten-thousand-chariot state under a great scholar's guidance would quickly become a hegemon. Thus, different types of Confucian scholars yield varying effects on governance, with Xunzi emphasizing the “effect of great scholars,” whose superior political capability can unify and harmonize the world.

In Xunzi's framework, the types of scholars—minor scholars and great scholars, conventional scholars and refined scholars—reflect a hierarchy: from lowest to highest, the order is conventional scholars, minor scholars, refined scholars, and great scholars. Conventional scholars conform to the customs of the time without embodying the principles or aspirations of Confucian ideals, neglecting law, reform, and the reverence for ritual. Minor scholars have reached a basic moral standard but remain driven by personal desires, pursuing Confucian ideals only superficially for societal approval, lacking true political insight. Refined scholars understand the importance of following the post-regal systems and upholding ritual and propriety,

with both actions and words aligned with established norms, though their knowledge has yet to reach the “comprehensive understanding of categories and principles” achieved by great scholars. Great scholars possess the highest moral standard and exceptional political abilities, seamlessly mastering knowledge and Confucian ideals, epitomizing the union of “inner sagehood and outer kingship”.

These four types of scholars represent distinct political ideals and abilities, leading to different political effects [13]. While refined scholars serve as essential talent for governance, great scholars are the most ideal for state administration, reflecting the aspirations for an ideal Confucian character during a time when the feudal states were gradually moving toward unification.

3. Clarifying the developmental trajectory of Confucian theories of personal virtue through the concept of “Inner Sagehood and Outer Kingship”

The Confucius’ ideal of the *junzi* (noble person) centers on the concept of *ren* (benevolence), emphasizing the fundamental role of *ren* and *li* (ritual propriety). As stated in the Analects, “If a person lacks *ren*, what use are ritual and music?” (Analects, Book 8, translated by the authors). Confucius holds that “Aspire to the Way, be grounded in virtue, and rely on *ren*” (Analects, Book 7, translated by the authors), making *ren* the foundation of the *junzi* personality; every trait of the *junzi* is built upon this basis. Those who embody *ren* show love for others, uphold loyalty and forgiveness, cultivate self-improvement, and take *ren* as a personal mission. With *ren* as the theoretical core and “affection for kin and respect for rulers” as foundational principles, Confucius transforms the slave-based patriarchal system rooted in “ancestral and ruler unity,” establishing the ideal of “inner sagehood and outer kingship”. *Ren* thus supports both personal moral cultivation and pragmatic application in governance. Consequently, a *junzi* embodying *ren* exemplifies the Confucian ideal of “inner sagehood and outer kingship”.

Mencius, grounding his thought in the doctrine of innate goodness, saw himself as both the inheritor and proponent of Confucius’ principles of *ren* (benevolence). He directly connected the principle of *ren* with personal moral cultivation, establishing the morally complete, “flood-like” *qi* (moral force) of the *da zhangfu* (true gentleman) as the ideal model of character advocated for *ren* governance (*renzheng*) and the Way of Kings (*wangdao*), advancing Confucius’ teachings by interpreting *ren* in conjunction with *yi* (righteousness). He asserted that virtue should guide governance, encapsulated in the idea that “what can be desired is called the good”. On the basis of the innate goodness of human nature, Mencius argued that compassion, shame, modesty, and discernment are universal, inborn qualities that can be cultivated through personal effort. This framework implies that the development of sagehood and kingship is a dynamic and harmonious process: as one’s innate moral tendencies are expanded and perfected, one achieves the qualities of both a sage and a ruler. This dual cultivation underpins Mencius’ theory of *ji sheng ji wang* (the integration of sagehood and kingship), which builds upon and further develops Confucius’ ideal of “inner sagehood and outer kingship”. Mencius stressed the expansion of moral virtue as the

foundation for the rulers' authority, thereby establishing his vision of *renzheng* and *wangdao*.

Additionally, Mencius highlighted the importance of *yi*, advocating the principles of “valuing righteousness over profit” and “sacrificing life for righteousness” as a means of nurturing one's upright *qi*. A *junzi* (noble person) prioritizes moral integrity over life itself, holding the inner moral standard of *yi* as the guiding measure of action. The pursuit of a *da zhangfu* ideal, characterized by integrity and selflessness, not only underscores Mencius' emphasis on internal moral cultivation and the central role of “inner sagehood”, but also shaped the ancient Chinese intellectual's ethical perspective, prioritizing righteousness over profit and life itself.

Living at the end of the Warring States period, Xunzi witnessed the transition of regional states from prolonged conflict toward eventual unification, focusing his ideals on developing statesmen with the capacity to govern effectively and unify the realm—a talent of “outer kingship”. In continuing Confucian discourse on human nature, Xunzi challenged Mencius by asserting that “human nature is inherently evil”. He argued that human nature could be transformed through deliberate effort but required regulation through a combination of ritual (*li*) and law (*fa*) to maintain social order and govern the state. Xunzi emphasized the cultivation of morally and intellectually exemplary figures who integrate ritual propriety with legal order.

Xunzi's ideal of character culminates in the figures of the *shengren* (sage) and the *da ru* (great Confucian), embodying the ideal personality of the “sage-king”. He articulated this goal with the maxim, “Follow the former kings, unify ritual and righteousness, standardize institutions; use the shallow to master the broad, the present to master the past, and the singular to master the multitude”. The sage and the great Confucian, as Xunzi conceived them, achieve the highest levels of moral and intellectual perfection internally, while externally demonstrating political ability and accomplishments in governance. This ideal emphasizes practical achievements and the application of political talents, underscoring and elucidating the core aspirations and concrete dimensions of outer kingship.

4. Contemporary relevance of Confucian ideal personality for education

The Confucian virtues of *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (propriety), *zhi* (wisdom), and *xin* (trustworthiness) represent foundational symbols in the Confucian moral system. These principles encompass ideals such as the *ren* concept of “establishing oneself and helping others,” the ethical commitment to fairness and appropriateness, the stabilizing influence of propriety, the pursuit of wisdom through moral cultivation and learning, and the valuation of integrity as a precious virtue. Collectively, these elements continue to hold significant relevance for fostering moral integrity and cultivating responsible citizens in contemporary society. Confucianism's emphasis on moral education supports the enhancement of individuals' comprehensive abilities and encourages holistic personal development. Its perspective on placing righteousness over profit aids in guiding individuals toward sound values, resisting the excesses of materialism. Additionally, Confucianism's ethos of taking responsibility for the world fosters social responsibility and strengthens national

cohesion. Refined through time, the essence of Confucian thought remains a beacon of wisdom in modern society.

4.1. Strengthening inner resolve

In *Jinxin I*, it is recorded: “Prince Dian asked, “What is the duty of a scholar?” Mencius replied, “To pursue aspiration”. Prince Dian asked further, “What does that mean?” Mencius responded, “It means nothing other than *ren* (benevolence) and *yi* (righteousness). To harm the innocent is not *ren*, and to take what is not yours is not *yi*. Where does one dwell? In *ren*. Where does one go? In *yi*. When one resides in *ren* and acts through *yi*, the conduct of a great person is complete”. Thus, holding a noble aspiration and acting according to *ren* and *yi* is essential to achieving a great character.

In today’s context, *shang zhi*—the pursuit of aspiration—reflects a commitment to one’s ideals and the establishment of high ambitions. For younger generations, solidifying such ideals as a lifelong pursuit is essential, including a steadfast belief in the shared goal of global harmony and sustainable development. To confront key issues of our times, it is necessary to maintain clarity of purpose and strategic resolve, while also embodying the courage to assume responsibility, to struggle, and to achieve true victory in human nature.

The Confucian ideal of personality, centered on cultivating virtues such as integrity, self-discipline, and commitment to learning, can greatly strengthen the inner resolve of university and college students. Confucius emphasized the development of *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (propriety), and *zhi* (wisdom), qualities that guide students not only in their academic journey but also in personal growth [14,15]. By embodying *ren*, students learn to empathize with others, fostering a supportive community even amidst competition and stress. *Yi* instills a sense of ethical responsibility, encouraging students to act rightly even when challenges arise. The value of *li*, or propriety, reminds them to respect the structure and discipline of their studies, while *zhi*, wisdom, inspires a love for learning that goes beyond grades and immediate rewards. Together, these Confucian principles nurture a resilient mindset, helping students find purpose in their educational journey, embrace challenges, and stay motivated even when faced with adversity. In essence, Confucian virtues offer students a grounding framework to build character and maintain resolve, essential for achieving both academic success and personal fulfillment [16].

4.2. Fulfilling a historical mission

Confucian thought holds that a sense of responsibility is the practical embodiment of ideals and a transformative force in shaping the world. The spirit of responsibility translates this awareness into action, becoming the internal drive for practical engagement. In contemporary terms, responsibility means developing strong competencies and fulfilling a historical mission. For the younger generation to shoulder this mission, they must first cultivate a solid foundation of skills and knowledge to meet the demands of the era.

The Confucian concept of the ideal personality urges university and college students to see themselves as part of a larger historical and social fabric, inspiring them to fulfill what Confucius viewed as a moral obligation to society. Confucius promoted

the notion of a *junzi* who not only strives for personal virtue but also for societal harmony, believing that individual growth contributes to the welfare of the collective. This perspective encourages students to approach their education with a sense of purpose that transcends personal ambition, cultivating a mindset focused on making a meaningful impact. The Confucian virtues of *ren* (benevolence) and *yi* (righteousness) particularly reinforce the importance of aligning one's talents and efforts with the greater good, motivating students to contribute to their communities, address societal issues, and work toward long-term progress. This sense of historical mission means students are not simply studying for their own future but preparing to take on roles that will influence the future of their society, whether through leadership, innovation, or advocacy. By viewing themselves as heirs to a tradition of moral duty, Confucianism inspires students to develop not only the skills needed for their careers but also a commitment to social responsibility, positioning them as changemakers in their time.

4.3. Sustaining the pursuit of lofty ideals

As Mencius writes, “When Heaven is about to place a great responsibility on a person, it first tests their resolve, exhausts their strength, exposes them to hunger, deprives them, and frustrates their efforts, all to stimulate their heart and strengthen their nature, thus enhancing their capabilities” (Mencius, Gaozi II). Achieving lofty ideals is neither immediate nor effortless; it requires modern individuals to possess both resilient willpower and unwavering determination.

Such a vision instills in students a sense of responsibility to uphold and work toward ideals that go beyond personal gain, such as justice, societal harmony, and compassion for others. By cultivating qualities like *ren* (benevolence) and *li* (propriety), students learn to value ethical integrity and social harmony, inspiring them to maintain their aspirations regardless of setbacks. Confucius also taught that genuine progress comes from consistent self-improvement, reminding students that the pursuit of ideals requires patience and inner strength. This approach equips students with the resilience needed to remain focused on their long-term goals, helping them to rise above obstacles with a clear sense of purpose. In a world that often prioritizes immediate rewards, Confucian principles encourage students to hold steadfast to their loftiest aspirations, viewing their educational journey as part of a lifelong commitment to bettering themselves and, by extension, society.

4.4. Educational implications

The Confucian ideal personality, centered around virtues like moral integrity, wisdom, respect, and a commitment to continuous self-cultivation, carries profound implications for contemporary education. Confucius emphasized the role of education not merely as a means to acquire knowledge, but as a path to develop one's character and fulfill one's potential as a morally grounded and socially responsible individual. In this view, education is not transactional but transformative, aiming to create individuals who embody benevolence and righteousness, with a deep-rooted sense of duty to others. This holistic perspective suggests that educational institutions should focus not only on academic achievement but also on fostering ethical values, empathy,

and self-discipline. By integrating Confucian ideals, educators can encourage students to see learning as a lifelong process aimed at personal betterment and social harmony, rather than solely as a means to career advancement. Such an approach can also cultivate resilience and inner strength, helping students to face challenges with patience and perseverance. Ultimately, Confucian educational philosophy reinforces the idea that true success is measured not only by personal accomplishment but by one's positive contributions to society, a principle that remains highly relevant in today's interconnected and rapidly changing world.

In line with the above principles, educators should focus on fostering both moral and intellectual development in their daily teaching practices, guiding students not just to excel academically but to grow as compassionate, ethical individuals. Educators can prioritize *de* (virtue) by modeling respect, empathy, and integrity, setting an example that students can emulate in their own behavior. Encouraging students to practice *li* (propriety) helps create a respectful learning environment where collaboration and consideration for others are valued. Educators should also emphasize the importance of *yi* (righteousness), and encourage students to make thoughtful, ethical decisions and recognize the broader impacts of their actions. By promoting *ren* (benevolence) in classroom interactions, teachers can nurture students' ability to empathize, listen actively, and support their peers. Confucianism also highlights the value of perseverance, so educators should encourage a mindset of continuous improvement, helping students embrace challenges as growth opportunities. This can be done through constructive feedback, emphasizing effort over outcome, and encouraging a love for learning that goes beyond grades or immediate rewards. By incorporating these Confucian values into everyday interactions and curriculum, educators can help students build character and resilience, preparing them to contribute positively to society.

Especially since the launch of the "Traditional Culture into the campus" action, the spiritual nourishment of excellent traditional Chinese culture has played a greater role in nourishing students' personality growth. Educators have also actively explored various practices of Confucianism on campus, and a series of learning activities themed on Confucianism have achieved encouraging results. In Shandong Province, the hometown of Confucius, Qingdao Binhai School invited experts and scholars to hold a wonderful lecture and calligraphy creation activity for more than 200 students with the title of "Approaching Confucius and Understanding Confucius". Since its establishment, the Confucius Institute in Pingjiang County, Hunan Province, has organized more than 500 public lectures on family traditions, carried out traditional culture activities in 33 schools in the county, and so far, donated and erected Confucius ICONS to 12 schools, creating a strong good atmosphere of learning Confucianism in the school. At Dongsha Primary School in Liwan District, Guangzhou, the school takes advantage of weekly class meetings and speech time under the national flag to lead students to read the Analects of Confucius and learn Confucianism. In addition, Dongsha Primary School also actively uses information network tools to regularly push learning materials such as the Analects of Confucius on the wechat public account, encouraging parents to use Confucian classics as teaching materials for family education, advocating parent-child reading, leading good family traditions,

realizing home-school co-education, and letting Confucianism and personality ideals infiltrate students' hearts [17].

4.5. Relevance for global sustainability

In January 1988, at the conclusion of a meeting in Paris, 75 Nobel laureates collectively declared that if human beings want to live in peace and prosperity in the 21st century, they must go back 2500 years to draw upon the wisdom of Confucius [18]. Against the backdrop of increasing conflicts in various parts of the world and numerous global challenges such as resource scarcity and climate change [19], the Confucian ideal personality holds significant relevance for global sustainability by promoting ethical responsibility, empathy, and a long-term perspective essential for addressing global challenges. Confucian thought emphasizes the interconnectedness of all people and the natural world, teaching individuals to view themselves not as isolated beings but as integral parts of a broader ecological and social system [20]. This worldview encourages a sense of stewardship, urging individuals to act with a duty toward both current and future generations [21]. The Confucian principle of *ren* fosters compassion and care for others, promoting actions that respect human dignity and environmental well-being, both critical components of sustainable development. Moreover, the Confucian commitment to self-discipline and moderation discourages excessive consumption and waste, aligning with the principles of environmental conservation and responsible resource use. By cultivating these values, the Confucian ideal personality can inspire a global citizenry that prioritizes ethical action, cooperation, and long-term thinking—key elements in the pursuit of sustainability on a global scale. Thus, integrating Confucian principles into education can help develop leaders and communities that are dedicated to creating a balanced, sustainable world for future generations.

Confucianism has deeply shaped the values and codes of conduct of contemporary students, and cultural genes such as “benevolence”, “propriety”, “harmony” and “struggle” have deeply influenced the character of Chinese students. Through the interview survey of Chinese college students, the research finds that contemporary college students show a strong sense of social responsibility and lofty ideals, and they are eager to give full play to their professional expertise to contribute to the development of the country, which shows that the Confucian traditional ideal of “self-cultivation, family harmony, governance and peace of the world” has a positive impact on the values and behavior orientation of college students. In addition, the Confucian tradition of attaching importance to interpersonal communication and etiquette norms also subtly shapes students' social behavior. College students generally recognize the traditional virtues of honoring parents, respecting teachers, and living in harmony with their classmates, uphold the principle of modesty and modesty, and carry forward the spirit of self-improvement through hard work, highlighting the enduring theoretical value of Confucianism. Confucianism has also gone abroad to tell China's story on the world stage. By the end of 2023, 496 Confucius Institutes and 757 Confucius classrooms had opened and blossomed in 160 countries around the world, becoming shining business cards for spreading Chinese culture.

Under the guidance of Confucianism, schools can effectively combine the cultivation of Confucian ideal personality with the goal of global sustainability through curriculum design and activities, provide students with a comprehensive educational experience, and cultivate citizens with global responsibility and environmental awareness. We can set up environmental ethics courses and design interdisciplinary projects guided by Confucian thoughts of “benevolence” and “harmony”, so that students can understand the importance of sustainable development from multiple perspectives and experience the wisdom of “harmony without diversity”. Schools are encouraged to carry out volunteer service activities with the theme of environmental protection actions, actively cooperate with local communities to carry out environmental protection projects, enhance the connection between students and the community, and enhance the Confucian sense of responsibility of “cultivating one’s self, unifying the family, governing the country and stabilizing the world” in practice. We work closely with schools in other countries to develop international exchange programs so that students appreciate their responsibilities as global citizens.

5. Conclusion

This paper probes into the concrete connotation of the Confucian ideal of personality based on the theory of Confucius, Mencius and Xun, and focuses on the thought of “inner sagehood and outer kingship” to sort out the development of the Confucian ideal theory of personality. At the theoretical level, this paper, starting from the Confucian personality ideal theory, demonstrates the internal connection between Chinese excellent traditional culture and socialist core values: Chinese excellent traditional culture is the cultural soil that nourishes socialist core values, and socialist core values are the contemporary expression of Chinese excellent traditional culture. At the practical level, the article takes Confucian ideal personality as a moral model, discusses the integration path of Confucian ideal personality and contemporary civic moral practice from three aspects: strengthening ideal and belief, undertaking historical mission and carrying forward the spirit of struggle, and provides Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions for cultivating builders and leaders with global vision and pursuing sustainable development.

Confucian personality ideal provides theoretical guidance for shaping model personality with the characteristics of the Times, and the virtues contained in Confucian personality ideal reflect the core qualities needed by leaders with civic morality and committed to common welfare in the new era. Upholding ideals and beliefs, undertaking historical missions and carrying forward the spirit of struggle are not only the inheritance of the fine traditional Chinese culture, but also the key to building a harmonious society. The principles of the Confucian personality ideal embody concern for the global sustainable development goals and provide moral guidance and Chinese solutions for jointly addressing the challenges of the 21st century. Confucianism advocates an educational approach that values comprehensive moral and intellectual development to prepare citizens for social life and global participation. Integrating Confucian values into modern education systems can train

and inspire a new generation of leaders and thinkers to balance personal goals with social well-being and create a more harmonious and sustainable world.

The theory of Confucian ideal personality has evolved dynamically and continuously with the development of social history, and the humanistic care contained in its ideological core can enrich our understanding of sustainable development and global citizenship ethics. By absorbing historical wisdom and inheriting ideological wealth, we can build a harmonious future of “sharing beauty and the world” in the modern moral practice of Confucian personality ideal.

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