

# ***Confucius Influence on Primary Education--- Research Based on Eastsouthern Asian Countries***

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**Abstract:** This paper argues that Confucianism was one of the many influencing factors of cultural exchange between Asian countries in the past. As the most appropriate stage of education to shape human values and modes of thought, primary education should be the focus of research. This article focuses on three Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam. This article not only compares the setting of the primary school curriculum and the basic spread of Confucianism in these three countries but also compares it with the changes brought about by the original Confucianism in China. The extent to which Confucian culture has influenced primary education in Southeast Asian countries is respectively outlined through several comparisons.

**Keywords:** primary education; Confucianism; Southeast Asia; traditional.

## **1. Introduction**

From ancient times to the present, cultural exchange has been an essential condition for the world's cultural progress and an inherent requirement for promoting cultural globalization and diversity. Its influence between countries can be either implicit or explicit, sometimes intertwined organically. Confucianism, spreading to many Asian Countries, caused greater or lesser impact on them in political, economic, cultural and education system. Since there is an interdependent and interconnected relationship between education and culture, primary schools attract attention as an important stage in the educational stage where children shape their value and outlook briefly shape life values and learn new ideas. Compared with East Asia, Southeast Asian has comparatively received less attention among academic circle, which explains my intention for this program.

## **2. Confucianism and Confucianism Culture in Education**

Confucians founded Confucianism as one of the hundred schools of thought of the pre-Qin dynasty (Before 221 B.C), and its ideology advocates openness and tolerance. Unlike other Western philosophies, which emphasise individualism, Confucianism emphasizes integration and harmony. Since its birth, Confucianism has received the respect and esteem of many supporters and has profoundly impacted all aspects of Chinese history. Confucianism has evolved through at least four periods: pre-Qin Confucianism, Han Confucianism, Song, Ming and Qing Confucianism, and modern Confucianism. Only the doctrine put forward by Confucius in the pre-Qin period is the most original version of Confucianism. After that, Confucianism was a new thought gradually formed by people who changed and developed based on Confucius' original thought. Such thought

is persistently embodied in education system and gradually permeates itself in culture. Therefore, this paper focuses on Confucianism as established by Confucius.

Confucian culture has been influenced by overseas immigrants in its development abroad. When a large number of Chinese immigrants arrived in a new country, Confucian culture emerged and had an impact in a new region. Confucianism culture in education is attracting attention from different countries in all aspects [1].

### **3. The Influence of Confucianism on Chinese Education**

Confucianism has played an essential role in developing human civilization in China. With the development of society, Confucianism has shaped a uniquely Chinese approach to education. In education, Confucius advocated the principle of "teaching without discrimination," meaning that students were recruited and trained on a large scale. At the same time, he did not care about his students' family backgrounds or social status. Confucius did not hold different attitudes because of their status. The reality of society at that time was that people were also facing class in education. The priority of ordinary people must be to survive and have a stable environment. It resulted in the lowest stratum of society not having access to knowledge. At that time, only the nobles with high social status could have the power to learn knowledge. Until now, students from low-income families could get state subsidies. Minorities could get extra marks in the entrance exams because of their status, and so on. All these can be considered based on the extension of Confucius' ideas. In this respect, Confucius succeeded in changing the educational situation in China at that time.

Secondly, Confucius continued to uphold the importance he placed on "benevolence" (Ren)(1) and "propriety" (Li)(2) in Confucianism. Confucius emphasized to his students that they needed to be filial to their parents and respectful to their brothers and sisters. In addition to their studies, they also need to observe etiquette and obey social institutions in all aspects of society. All human activities, whether seeing, hearing, speaking, or doing, must conform to "propriety".(Li) These two core ideas, which were considered most important by Confucius, have been well preserved and developed today. It is still a highly valued element of Chinese education.

Thirdly, Confucius advocated the method of "individualized quality education". Because Confucius was not limited in the types of students he could recruit, he came up with a targeted approach to teaching. In other words, Confucius adopted different teaching methods according to the students' different personalities, characteristics, and abilities to achieve the ideal teaching effect. In addition, Confucius still put forward many constructive Confucian ideas that significantly impacted the Chinese education system and educational model. All of these ideas were widely used and disseminated in China. Eventually, Confucianism became the core value of traditional Chinese culture, and moral education became the focus of Chinese educational content [2].

### **4. Changes and Influence in Primary Education in China**

According to historical records, in ancient China, the entrance threshold of "elementary school" was restricted. In the Western Zhou Dynasty, before the advent of Confucius, the children of the nobility were allowed to attend school if they were eight years old, while the poor people had no means or right to attend school. Therefore, the elementary school at that time was also called "official school education" (3). The six arts (4) were the basic subjects of education, namely "ritual, music, archery, carriage (driving, or horse-riding), calligraphy, and mathematics". Among them, "calligraphy" and "mathematics" were studied by students as the main curriculum of elementary school. "calligraphy" refers to writing, and "mathematics" refers to arithmetic. In addition, students were required to learn the "six rituals,"(5) which are the six types of expressions and attitudes that should be displayed on different occasions. As a whole, the content of the "official school education" is very specific and

practical. The purpose of its existence is to train the successors of the public officials and scholars, the qualified builders and governors of the Zhou dynasty, which is typical of pragmatic teaching. This is also in line with the characteristic that education is entirely for the use of the nobility.

Primary education can also be regarded as enlightenment education. Although the ancients attached great importance to children's initiation education, it was not popular due to the monopoly of knowledge by the nobility. This phenomenon was not broken until the appearance of Confucius. Confucius established his own "private school"(6) and provided equal opportunities for all to learn. Education became less rare and less privileged among the general public. According to records, the oldest of Confucius' students was only four years younger than him, and the youngest was fifty-four years younger than Confucius. This shows that Confucius did not divide the "private school" into elementary school or the highest seat of learning(7) when he opened it and integrated all education into one. In terms of subject setting, in addition to the necessary ritual courses, Confucius added six ancient classical works to the original Six Arts: The Book of Songs, The Book of History, The Book of Change, Classic of Rites, The Book of Music, and Spring and Autumn Annals. These six works are called the "Six Classic Books" or "Six Arts". He proposed and implemented the teaching method of "individualized quality education" in the process of teaching. He also put forward many new educational ideas, such as the idea that students should not be "feel happy when told of one's errors" (8) but should "gain new insights through reviewing old material" (9) and "Keeping silent and thinking, studying without satiety, teaching others without weariness." (10). ". In contrast, the "private school" established by Confucius was comprehensive and popular.

Today's primary school education in China still retains some of the changes brought by Confucius. Firstly, a primary school in China is compulsory, meaning that all elementary schools in China are open to all children of school age. No matter what race, ethnicity, gender, colour, language, or socioeconomic status, all children between the ages of six and seven are required to attend primary school. This nature is in line with Confucius' ancient idea of "education without discrimination". Secondly, a primary school in China is still comprehensive. At the primary school level, the school curriculum and habits are increasingly oriented toward the all-around development of moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic development. Students no longer need to learn more than what they can learn from books. For the elementary school teacher, it is important to constantly understand and study the students, combine respect with rigour, devote oneself to guiding the students, and make clear to them the social significance of learning knowledge, and so on. In other words, modern people have learned from Confucianism and made innovations and reforms based on it to come up with a system of elementary education that meets the needs of modern students. Confucianism is still the core of the education system. Overall, Confucius' innovations and Confucianism had a significant impact on primary education, or enlightenment, in ancient China. He succeeded in bringing enlightenment education to a wider audience of ordinary people, thus influencing the next generation. Confucian teaching consists of three components: moral education, cultural knowledge, and skill development.

## **5. The Spread and Influence of Confucianism in Malaysia**

Malaysia, as a multicultural country with a multiethnic population, has been influenced by a wide range of cultures, including China. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism are well known as China's "three religions" in Malaysia. These three religions have gradually blended and redeveloped with the local culture to become a "popular religions ". However, because of the misunderstanding of Confucianism in Malaysia during the cultural importation of Confucian writings, Confucianism has only been spread as a religion among people. Although Confucius did not create a complete religious system [3]. Instead, Confucius became a god associated with education, and people would even go to temples to worship Confucius before the start of the school year. In other words,

Confucianism has been integrated into a model of a religion associated with education in Malaysia, and it spread continuously and successfully. It has gradually taken its place in the hearts of the ethnic Chinese community or native citizens.

The Malaysian elementary school is a six-year system, and the curriculum is divided into level 1 and level 2, as can be seen in Table 1. (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2013) The content of the curriculum shows that Malaysia is open and tolerant to this foreign culture. It is an indirect indication that Malaysia will respond positively and positively to cultural integration. However, the state places more importance on the cohesion of people and inter-ethnic relations and to this end influences and changes people through moral education. it can be seen from the curriculum that moral education is taught throughout the six years of primary schooling in Malaysia and that both Islam and moral education are included in the traditional curriculum. The Malaysian Education Department hopes that through the moral education curriculum, the new generation of citizens in this multicultural country will develop a sense of identity and pride in their society and country to contribute to the country when they grow up [4]. In 1983, Moral Education, based on the principle of National Ideology, was introduced as a core subject in Malaysia [5].

28) The analysis and comparison of the content of Confucianism and the content of moral education revealed that Confucianism has made a great value and influence on moral education. These include the core idea of "Ren", which Confucius promoted; the link between the relationship between heaven and man and the moral attributes of Confucius, and the content of moral education. However, the content of moral education is still oriented towards the national ideology of Malaysia alone. Confucianism, while fitting in with the moral education content that Malaysia wants to disseminate, has served to make up for the lack of ideological and moral education content [5].

Table 2 (Ministry of Education, Malaysia 2013) deals with the traditional curriculum content that students in primary schools in Malaysia must study. It shows that primary education in Malaysia also attaches great importance to transmitting traditional culture and customs to students while embracing multiculturalism. For example, the Malaysian Education Bureau supports heritage education and expects a broader range of development.

In general, although Confucianism is recognized and accepted in Malaysia's multi-ethnic society, the main reason is that its content consciousness is very much in line with the moral ideology that Malaysia wants to disseminate and to the extent that it makes up for some of the deficiencies and is thus introduced into moral education for learning. Therefore, its influence on primary education is less and comparable to that of other ethnic cultures. Confucianism has had a limited impact on primary education in Malaysia.

Table 1: KSSR subjects.

	Level1 subject (year 1,2,3)		Level2 subject (year 4,5,6)
Core basic module	Bahasa Malaysia	Core subjects	Bahasa Malaysia
	English		English
	Chinese/Tamil		Chinese/Tamil
	Islam/Moral Education		Mathmetics
	Physical education		Science

Table 1 (continued).

	Health Education		Islam/Moral Education
Thematic Core modules	Visual Art		Physical education
	Music		Health Education
	Science and Technology		Visual Art Education
Elective subjects	Languages(Arabic/Chinese/Tamil/Iban/Kadazan-Dusun)		Music Education
			Design and Technology/Information and Communication Technology
			History
		Elective subjects	Languages(Arabic/Chinese/Tamil/Iban/Kadazan-Dusun)

Table 2: Heritage in subject.

subject	Theme	Heritage Aspect
ICT	Heritage is not the direct concern of this subject but can be applied either as a subject of presentation or material of web search.	all
History	- Malay Kingdom	Intangible cultural heritage
	- National Heritage (System of Monarchy, Malaysian ethnic traditions)	
	- Religious, beliefs, festivals, artefacts	
Art and music	- Traditional arts and crafts	Intangible cultural heritage
	- Traditional Malaysian music and performance	
Bahasa Malaysia	- Traditional food, costumes, games, and other forms of traditional entertainment	Intangible cultural heritage
	- Visit to heritage sites	Tangible cultural heritage
English	- Cultural Songs	Intangible cultural heritage
	- Heritage performance	Tangible cultural heritage

Table 2: (continued).

	- Traditional house, various crafts and textures, and the foods of Terengganu	
	- Malaysia's largest indoor and outdoor museums	
Islam and moral education	- Jawi (traditional Malaysian handwriting)	
	- The culture of various ethnic groups in Malaysia	Intangible cultural heritage
...	...	...

## 6. The spread and influence of Confucianism in Singapore

The introduction of Confucianism to Singapore dates back to the 19th century. The spread of Confucianism in Singapore can be divided into two stages: the first period was from 1819 to the end of the 19th century. During this period, some Chinese culture, including Buddhism and Confucianism, was introduced to Singapore. At this time, Confucianism was successfully retained and continued to develop in Singapore in the form of religion. The second period was after the 1880s, when Confucianism gradually became the dominant ideology in Singapore. Singapore is also a pluralistic country with many cultures. So Singapore was also faced with a test of national civic cohesion. The Prime Minister of Singapore believes that they need to be proactive in preserving the local traditional language and culture, rather than blindly learning Western culture or even completely Westernizing it. The Singapore government wanted to prevent children from living in a country where religious culture, moral thinking, and traditional values are still unstable. The Singapore government hopes to help children develop a traditional value system of Singaporeans, or Asians, by incorporating a moral education curriculum [6]. As a result of the Confucianism movement, Confucianism was incorporated into the religious curriculum established in primary and secondary schools between 1984 and 1992. It was called the "Confucian Ethics" course. At that time, third and fourth graders were allowed to take several religious courses that included Confucianism [7]. Singapore was also the first country to incorporate Confucianism directly into the elementary school curriculum. It is a testament to the deep influence of Confucianism in Singapore at the time. However, after the official launch of the curriculum, it unexpectedly caused a reaction of repulsion from other religions. It led to the Ministry of Education having to abandon it. Confucianism became the least popular subject among the students.

Confucianism did not succeed in being included directly in the elementary school curriculum content set. Therefore, the Singapore government's curriculum for Confucian ethics is unanimously considered a failure. Confucianism has not had a profound and positive impact on primary education in Singapore. The development of Confucianism in higher education and social education beyond primary education has not received much impediment. As Singapore's diverse cultures were absorbed and continued to spread, the original Confucianism successfully intermingled with other cultures and ideas to produce a new ideology that was in line with Singapore's own national conditions and civic characteristics.

## 7. The spread and influence of Confucianism in Vietnam

Due to historical reasons, Vietnam has a closer relationship with China. From the ancient time when Qin Shi Huang unified China (Before 221 BC), many Confucian scholars exiled to Vietnam along with the people of the Middle Kingdom. Confucianism then began to spread into Vietnam from then on. After its further spread and development, Confucianism gradually influenced many local people



in Vietnam and developed into Confucianism, which had a profound impact on the local people. Culture and education are among the areas that have been most influenced by Confucianism. For example, in the olden days, feudal intellectuals were the most important group of Vietnamese people, far more important than peasants and workers, and finally business sectors. The reason why they were considered as models in society was that they had the following characteristics: loyal, filial, courteous, righteous, wise, and trustworthy. These characteristics are in line with the ideology of Confucianism at that time. Confucianism happened to be used as a measure of the harmony of major relationships by the Vietnamese people in their education system. It proves that the ideology of Vietnamese people at that time was influenced by Confucianism. With the development of Confucianism in Vietnam, imperial examination was gradually introduced, and people were taught that "everyone has the right to learn", which is the same as "teaching without discrimination" practiced by Confucius. discrimination. It is a proof that Confucianism has been influencing primary and higher education in Vietnam since the old days [8].

The legacy of Confucianism can still be found in the curriculum of Vietnam's modern education system.

Table 3: shows the priorities and issues of moral education in elementary school in Vietnam today [9].

Grade	Focus	Sample topics
Grade 1 Age 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivation of virtues (tidiness, obedience, friendliness, politeness)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being neat and tidy</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building proper manners and behaviour at home and school (respect for elderly, teachers)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nourishing family love</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding and appreciating the natural environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being respectful and obedient to teachers</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being cooperative with friends</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saying thanks and apGradeologies</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protecting plants and trees in public places</li> </ul>
Grade 2 Age 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivation of virtues (punctuality, truthfulness, respect, labour, politeness)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being punctual</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of love for nature, love for community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizing mistakes and correcting mistakes</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing interest in doing housework</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caring for friends</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being polite while talking, making suggestions and requests</li> </ul>

Table 3: (continued).

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping the disabled</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protecting animals</li> </ul>
Grade 3 Age 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivation of virtues, development of cultural awareness, friendly attitudes towards people from other countries; appreciation of soldiers and national defenders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showing respect to Uncle Ho Chi Minh</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping promises</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working independently</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping neighbours</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciating veterans and soldiers</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respecting international visitors</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respecting other people's confidential matters</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saving water resources</li> </ul>
Grade 4 Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building personality (honesty, hardworking, self-discipline, self-esteem)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being studious</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing proper relations with other people (friends, family members, neighbours)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active participation in team work</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being punctual</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Never telling lies</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping bullied children</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping teachers</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping promises</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saving money and time</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking care of grandparents</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping neighbours</li> </ul>
Grade 5 Age 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivation of virtues (sincerity, cooperative spirit, respect for other people)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sincerity in study and work</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of understanding of foreign countries, kindness to foreigners, appreciation of national identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperative attitude in study and work</li> </ul>



Table 3: (continued).

		• Respecting former teachers
		• Sharing emotions with friends
		• Making grandparents and parents happy
		• Respecting the elderly
		• Helping the young
		• Giving consolation to unlucky people
		• Helping the police
		• Appreciating veterans and soldiers
		• Respecting international visitors
		• Respecting well-known people
		• Being appreciative of Uncle Ho Chi Minh

According to the information provided in Table 3, moral education in elementary school focuses more on building character and human qualities. They are taught to respect their elders and teachers and to get along with their friends. They are taught to respect their elders and teachers, to get along with their friends, and to develop virtues such as honesty and courtesy. After learning the content of moral education in elementary schools, students will gradually develop a combination of values of benevolence, honesty, loyalty, and courage in their hearts.

However, this is not enough to prove that Confucianism still has a significant influence in primary education in Vietnam today. The moral education of students in schools incorporates various aspects, including the importance of family culture, the construction of social thought system and other basic educational contents related to Vietnamese local culture [9]. The content of moral education is not deep enough to achieve the desired effect of the curriculum. The quality of the course content is not up to the standard and may even achieve the opposite effect [8].

In conclusion, there is no doubt that Confucianism has had a profound impact on the whole country of Vietnam. However, through the passage of time and continuous development, Vietnamese culture, including primary education, has been transformed into a culture and educational content with Vietnamese characteristics based on the influence of Confucianism. Confucianism has been integrated into the moral education of primary education as the basic educational content for students to learn.

## 8. Conclusion

Confucianism has a long history of spread and wide influence in Southeast Asia. The geographical environment has provided convenient conditions for spreading Confucianism in Southeast Asian countries. Most Southeast Asian countries share the common characteristics of diversity and tolerance, which are important prerequisites for the smooth spread of Confucianism. But it is also the reason why Confucianism is limited in each country. Confucianism is not as influential as in China and is often limited and weakened by other cultures. Therefore, according to the results of

this comparative study, most countries choose to integrate Confucianism into the moral or religious curriculum of primary education for students to learn. Confucianism does not deeply influence the primary education stage in each country.

## Appendix

1. Ren (Chinese: 仁, meaning "co-humanity" or "humaneness")
2. Li (Chinese: 礼) originally meant "a religious sacrifice, but has come to mean ceremony, ritual, decorum, rules of propriety, good form, good custom, etc., and has even been equated with natural law."
3. official schools education: Official school refers to the school system directly organized and administered by the Chinese feudal imperial court, as well as the school system run by successive governments in accordance with administrative divisions.
4. six arts: it formed the basis of education in ancient Chinese culture.
5. six rituals: it is the ancients daily norms of behavior, is the basic etiquette of human communication. Including: auspicious ceremony (sacrificial ceremony), fierce ceremony (funeral ceremony), military ceremony (military ceremony), guest ceremony (prince's ceremony to meet the son of Heaven), Jiali (daily life ceremony).
6. private school: or "sishu", a private homeschooling system established by the disciples of Confucius and implemented as the traditional education system of China from the Autumn and Spring period (770 BC) until the Qing dynasty (1911 AD).
7. the highest seat of learning in ancient times in China: similar as university today
- 8/9/10: Cite from the analects of Confucius

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