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JURNAL STUDI AGAMA-AGAMA

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MULTICULTURALISM ON CONFUCIANISM PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is expected to serve as a reference for exploring the concept of multiculturalism from the perspective of Confucianism. This research seeks to identify the values of multiculturalism within Confucian education, so that the concept of Multicultural Education from a Confucian perspective can be better understood. The study employs a qualitative method through library research, as it directly engages with available data and literature sources. The findings of the study conclude that Confucian teachings have significant relevance to multicultural education. This is explained through the concepts of Shu, Ren, and Zhong in Confucianism. The principle of Shu emphasizes openness to other cultures by demonstrating cross-cultural empathy, supporting multicultural characteristics such as democracy, equality, and tolerance. The concept of Ren reinforces universal human values, highlighting the importance of compassion and respect for others regardless of cultural, religious, or racial differences. Through the concept of Zhong, Confucian teachings can contribute to the realization of social harmony by promoting respect for diversity. Therefore, Confucian teachings, in addition to being recognized as a religion, can also be viewed as a Confucian philosophy whose values are highly universal and adaptable to the needs of global education.

Keywords: *Education, Multicultural, Confucianism*

Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini diharapkan dapat dijadikan sebagai salah satu bahan kajian tentang konsep multikulturalisme dari Perspektif Konfusianisme atau Khonghucu. Dalam penelitian ini berusaha menemukan nilai-nilai multikulturalisme dalam Pendidikan Konfusianisme. Sehingga dapat dipahami konsep Pendidikan Multikultural dari Perspektif Konfusianisme. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif studi pustaka (*library research*). Metode ini di gunakan karena pada penelitian ini dihadapkan langsung dengan data-data dan sumber pustaka yang disajikan. Hasil penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa ajaran Konfusianisme) memiliki relevansi yang signifikan terhadap pendidikan multikultural. Hal tersebut di jelaskan dengan Konsep *Shu*, *Ren* dan *Zhong* dalam Konfusianisme. Prinsip shu menekankan keterbukaan terhadap budaya lain dengan menunjukkan empati lintas budaya, yang mendukung karakteristik multikultural seperti

demokrasi, kesetaraan, dan toleransi. Konsep ren memperkuat nilai kemanusiaan universal, menekankan pentingnya kasih sayang dan rasa hormat terhadap sesama tanpa memandang perbedaan budaya, agama, atau ras. Melalui konsep zhong, ajaran Konfusianisme dapat membantu mewujudkan keharmonisan sosial melalui penghargaan atas perbedaan. Maka ajaran Konfusianisme selain diakui sebagai agama juga dapat di pandang sebagai Filsafat Konfusianisme yang nilai-nilainya sangat universal, memiliki kemampuan untuk mengadaptasi kebutuhan Pendidikan global..

Kata kunci: Pendidikan, Multikultural, Konfusianisme

INTRODUCTION

The concept of education with a humanistic approach has become a very popular educational approach today. People have begun to care about humanizing humans again — raising cultural and social issues and approaches that enable people to live together more peacefully. One of the issues frequently promoted is multiculturalism. Indonesia consists of seven hundred ethnic groups with different traditions; it is time to build a multicultural culture as advocated by the late Gus Dur. Every ethnic group needs to preserve its culture so that it can be more open and bring benefits to everyone. ¹.

The multicultural approach is already implicit in Law No. 20 of 2003, which formulates the functions and objectives of national education that should be used in efforts to develop education in Indonesia. Article 3 of the National Education System Law (Sisdiknas) states that national education functions to develop the capabilities and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation in order to educate the life of the nation; it aims at the development of learners' potential so that they become human beings who believe in and are devoted to God Almighty, who have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens. According to Jason Lase, in terms of the constellation of legislation, particularly Law No. 20 Sisdiknas, the principles and perspectives of multicultural education are already reflected and contained therein.²

In the academic sphere, based on recent empirical studies, the integration of multicultural education is consistently linked to the development of students' character toward greater tolerance and inclusivity. A literature review concluded that integrating values such as tolerance, democracy, equality, and justice into multicultural education

¹ Oesman Arif, *Gema Kebajikan Dari Gunung Tai Shan Nabi Kongzi Mengajar Agama Mengajar Filsafat Serta Mendesain Budaya Tionghoa* (gentanusantara.com, 2021), <https://www.store.gentanusantara.com/product/gema-kebajikan-dari-gunung-tai-shan/>.

² Ubadah, *Pendidikan Multikultural : Konsep, Pendekatan, Dan Penerapannya Dalam Pembelajaran* (Pesantren Anwarul Qur'an, 2022).

at the primary school level can have a positive impact on students' social skills³. These findings are also in line with researchers who assert that multicultural education is a solution for building a character of tolerance so that communal harmony can be realized in Indonesia, a multicultural country. Field results also support these findings. For example, an action research study in Bali found that the consistent cultivation of diversity values resulted in a significant increase in students' tolerant attitudes. Some students were able to tolerate and accept their peers who differed socially or culturally. Furthermore, integrating multicultural content into the curriculum has been shown to strengthen students' inclusive awareness, making them more reflective and tolerant in understanding religious and cultural differences⁴.

The research findings above underscore the importance of multicultural values (tolerance, appreciation of diversity, justice, equality) as foundations for building a harmonious and civilized learning environment. Multicultural education in Indonesia is also reflected in efforts to guarantee the rights of all citizens to practice their beliefs, in accordance with the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). This principle not only recognizes religious diversity but also encourages the creation of harmony among adherents of different religions through education that instills values of tolerance, justice, and equality. The implementation of multicultural education can serve as a strategic means to strengthen the spirit of unity amid diversity while building a more inclusive and respectful society.

Indonesia places Religion as one of the core subjects in schools. There are six religions officially recognized as being practiced by the people of Indonesia and recorded in legislation. One of these religions is Khonghucu, also known as Confucianism. As stated in Presidential Decree No. 1 of 1965, the religions practiced by the population of Indonesia are Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Khonghucu (Confucianism). This is evidenced by the historical development of religions in Indonesia. Because these six religions are the faiths embraced by most of the Indonesian population, they are guaranteed rights as provided under Article 29(2) of the Constitution and also receive assistance and protection as stipulated by that article.

For political reasons during the New Order era, the government issued Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967, which banned all forms of Chinese tradition, including Khonghucu, from being practiced publicly. That instruction marked the beginning of

³ Thomy Sastra Atmaja, "Implementasi Pendidikan Multikultural Di Sekolah Dasar Untuk Meningkatkan Keterampilan Sosial Peserta Didik," *Jurnal Basicedu* 8, no. 3 (June 4, 2024): 1906–15, <https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v8i3.7664>.

⁴ Agustinus Tanggu Daga et al., "Integrasi Nilai-Nilai Multikultural Dalam Kurikulum Pendidikan: Studi Literatur Tentang Dampaknya Terhadap Kesadaran Beragama Peserta Didik," *RIGGS: Journal of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Business* 4, no. 3 (2025): 5539–46, <https://doi.org/10.31004/riggs.v4i3.2809>.

discriminatory treatment against Khonghucu. Under the administration of President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), a great hope emerged for the Khonghucu religion with the revocation of Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967 and its replacement by Presidential Decree No. 6 of 2000. Since then changes occurred in the lives of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. After being silenced for 32 years, they were finally able to resume social activities and participate actively in education.⁵

As one of the religions existing alongside others in Indonesia, Khonghucu is naturally also obliged to implement multicultural education. That background underlies the purpose of this study as a review of the concept of multiculturalism from the Confucian (Khonghucu) perspective, considering that education and research on Khonghucu in Indonesia have started to develop again after being suppressed for 32 years.

Khonghucu, besides being recognized as a religion, can also be regarded as Confucian philosophy whose values are highly universal and capable of adapting to the needs of global education. Based on the exposition of these data, several questions arise in this study: Are there multicultural values within Confucian education? What is the concept of multicultural education from the perspective of Confucianism? Theoretically, the aim of this research is expected to serve as a reference study on the concept of multiculturalism from the perspective of Confucianism or Khonghucu. It is hoped that this study will be useful as a contribution to multicultural education studies, particularly from the perspective of Confucian education, and can serve as a reference for future research.

Multiculturalism has become one of the important concepts for understanding the dynamics of plural societies around the world. Cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity creates both challenges and opportunities for building harmony in communal life. This concept emerged as a response to the need to manage differences within society, particularly in the context of globalization that brings various cultural identities into contact. In the field of education, instilling multicultural concepts serves as a foundation for shaping a generation that can appreciate differences, prioritize unity, and uphold values of social justice.

According to H.A.R. Tilaar (2011), etymologically the words multicultural or multiculturalism derive from “multi,” meaning plural or of many kinds; “kultur,” meaning culture; and “-ism,” meaning an ideology or movement. Meanwhile, Ismail and Abdul Mukti (2019) explain that the term multicultural or multiculturalism initially referred to the concept popularized in Canada and was used as a synonym for pluralism. In fact, the term “multicultural society” was first used in Canada around the 1950s. In the United

⁵ Rofida Rahmadani, T T Taufiq, and Djurban, “Membaca Ulang Multikulturalisme Otonomis Agama Khonghucu Di Indonesia:(Identitas, Kultural Dan Kesenjangan),”: *Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 18, no. 02 (2022).

States, a similar concept is often referred to as the “melting pot” society, while in India it is called a “composite society.” In Indonesia, the idea is commonly expressed with the slogan *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* to indicate diversity of ethnicity, religion, and race.⁶

The extent to which an educational concept contains multicultural values can be measured using the characteristics of multiculturalism. According to Abdullah Aly, there are three main characteristics of multicultural education :

1. Grounded in democracy, equality, and justice;
2. Oriented toward humanity, togetherness, and peace;
3. Developing attitudes of recognizing, accepting, and valuing diversity.⁷

UNESCO also recommends four core values of multicultural education as follows, First. Tolerance. According to Qiqi Yulianti Zakiah and H.A. Rusdiana (2001), tolerance is an attitude and behavior that respects differences in religion, ethnicity, race, opinions, attitudes, and actions of others who are different from oneself. Second, Democracy. In relation to multicultural education, the value of democracy implies equal rights and obligations as well as equal treatment in education and the learning process. Third. Justice. As Imam Tolkhah (2019) states, justice is the awareness to treat others impartially, not to favor, and not to discriminate in showing partiality toward others because of differences in skin color, group, ethnicity, religion, economic status, gender, and so on. Fourth. Equality. According to Imam Tolkhah (2019), equality is the view that people are in the same condition, destined to be of equal standing and to have complementary roles; to treat others equally and with the same dignity.⁸

An example of multicultural education from a Confucian perspective can be found in Singapore. Because the ethnic Chinese are dominant in Singapore, the society carries a Confucian cultural heritage. In the implementation of national development, Singapore uses Confucian culture to raise multicultural awareness (Wu et al., 2020). In this context, Singapore requires strong multicultural education to prevent conflict and to remain a developed country in Southeast Asia and globally. Zixia (a disciple of Confucius) is reported to have said, “All within the four seas are brothers.” Based on the explanations in the *Analects*, we can already observe Confucius’s cosmopolitanism that transcends local boundaries.⁹

⁶ Ubadah, *Pendidikan Multikultural : Konsep, Pendekatan, Dan Penerapannya Dalam Pembelajaran*.

⁷ Ubadah.

⁸ Ubadah.

⁹ Guoxiang Peng, “Confucius as a Cosmopolitan: Thought and Practice,” *Journal of Confucian Philosophy and Culture* 42, no. 42 (2024): 157–81, <https://doi.org/10.22916/jcpc.2024.42.157>.

The Concept of Multiculturalism in Confucianism

Confucianism (Khonghucu) has nine main books known as the Si Shu (the Four Books) and Wu Jing (the Five Classics). Lessons on history, morality, spirituality, and education can be found in these texts.¹⁰ One of the books included in the Si Shu is the Lun Yu, also known as the Analects of Confucius..

Based on two important sections of the Analects as outlined by Ivanhoe (2014), the concept of multicultural citizenship in Confucianism encompasses two main components: First. Openness to Other Cultures. A multicultural citizen is an individual who is open to and shows interest in other cultures. Such a person is guided by *shu* (恕, empathy), expressed through cross-cultural humility, curiosity, and active engagement. Second, Humanity Rooted in *Ren* 仁. A multicultural citizen also demonstrates and promotes the idea of a universal family rooted in *ren* (仁, humanity).¹¹

The concept of *shu* is more explicitly presented by Confucius as follows: “That is *têpa sarira*! What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others. (Lun Yu XV : 24). In Indonesian translations *shu* is rendered as *tepa sarira*; in some English versions it is translated as empathy. On another occasion Confucius explained *ren*, translated in Indonesian as “love/compassion,” as follows: “He who is not humane will not long endure pain, nor long endure pleasure. He who is humane feels at ease in humanity; and the wise feels fortunate in humanity.” (Lun Yu IV : 2). Concepts related to care for and respect of others, which support multicultural education also appear in verses of the Lun Yu, for example: “A junzi (a noble/wise person) can get along though not the same; a mean person can be the same though not get along.” (Kitab Lunyu XIII : 23). This verse illustrates that a noble-minded person can live in harmony despite belonging to different groups, ethnicities, or factions; conversely, a person of low virtue may cause conflict even within a homogeneous group.

The Analects or Lun Yu (XV:40) also records: “If the Way differs, do not argue about it.” In Confucius’ China there were many religious and philosophical schools; Confucius cautioned that when backgrounds and outlooks differ, arguing about which is “most correct” is fruitless and can breed conflict. Harmony should be the priority. Moreover, Zixia, one of Confucius’ disciples, is recorded as saying: “All within the four seas are brothers.” (Lun Yu XII:5). This statement explicitly indicates that Confucian education privileges global peace even amid ethnic and cultural differences.

¹⁰ Liem Santoso, “Konsep Psikologi Pendidikan Humanistik Dalam Ajaran Agama Khonghucu,” *Study Park of Confucius Journal: Jurnal Ekonomi, Sosial, Dan Agama* 1, no. 2 (2023).

¹¹ Sandra Pinhui Wu, Charlene Tan, and Connie S.L. Ng, “Educating Multicultural Citizens from a Confucian Heritage: Examples from Singapore,” in *Handbook of Research on Citizenship and Heritage Education*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-1978-3.ch023>.

Confucian values are integrated into the curriculum and practice of Khonghucu education in Indonesia. For example, the material “Harmony in Diversity” explains that God wills diversity so that differences can complement and support one another; therefore everyone should accept and appreciate the importance of each difference.¹² “Harmony in Diversity” is a Grade 10 topic that teaches the importance of harmony despite differences. The concept used in this material is *Zhong* or the middle, which represents balance or proportion. *Zhong* (中) or “the middle” denotes that which is fitting/appropriate in terms of time, speed, distance, quantity, and so forth. *Zhong* can be understood as that which is neither too fast nor too slow, neither too long nor too brief (time), neither too many nor too few (quantity), neither too high nor too low (position), neither too far nor too near (distance), neither too thick nor too thin (form), and so on.¹³

As a principle of the mean and proportionality, *zhong* functions as a normative mechanism that harmonizes differences by balancing the intensity, timing, and form of each party’s involvement. Harmony is not produced by uniformity but by placing different elements in the right proportion: giving space without drowning others, upholding principles without becoming extreme, and delaying impulsive reactions to allow constructive dialogue to occur. In a multicultural context, *zhong* becomes a practical guide for deciding when a demand should be met, when compromise is necessary, and when ethical limits must be enforced so that cultural, religious, or value differences do not clash but instead complement each other within a balanced social whole..

The concept of *Zhong* is explained in the book *Zhong Yong* (the Doctrine of the Mean). According to Chiu (2000) and Yang et al. (2016), *Zhongyong* thinking is the most influential thinking style in China, originating from traditional Chinese philosophical culture such as Confucianism. Initially it functioned as a supreme morality and later evolved into a basic cognitive principle that Chinese people use to navigate social life.¹⁴ Pedagogically, *zhong* encourages the cultivation of attitudes compatible with multiculturalism, such as empathy, respect for shared rules, and decision-making that maintains a balance of interests. Thus *zhong* is not merely an abstract concept but a practical tool for realizing harmony in diversity through policy, teaching practice, and character education that are proportionate.

¹² Siem Hong Hun, “Transmisi Budaya Dan Konsep Konfusianisme Dalam Kurikulum Pelajaran Agama Konghucu Di Indonesia,” *Indonesian Character Journal* 2, no. 2 (2025): 9–17, <https://doi.org/10.21512/icj.v2i2.12134>.

¹³ Gunadi and Hartono, *Pendidikan Agama Khonghucu Dan Budi Pekerti Kelas X*, 1st ed. (Pusat Kurikulum dan Perbukuan, Balitbang, Kemdikbud., 2014).

¹⁴ Shisi Zhou and Xueping Li, “Zhongyong Thinking Style and Resilience Capacity in Chinese Undergraduates: The Chain Mediating Role of Cognitive Reappraisal and Positive Affect,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (June 20, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.814039>.

Method

This study employs a qualitative library-research method. This method was chosen because the study directly engages with the presented data and literature sources. According to Mendes, Wohlin, Felizardo, & Kalinowski (2020), the process of literature research involves reviewing the literature and analyzing combined relevant topics.¹⁵ Thus, this method is expected to enable the researcher to explore in depth the concept of multicultural education within Confucianism based on theoretical foundations and existing scholarly studies. According to Mirshad (2014), there are four activities in library research, first: Recording all findings related to the “research problem” from each discussion found in the literature and/or the most recent discoveries concerning that research problem; second: Integrating all findings, whether theoretical or new empirical results; third, Analyzing all findings from various readings with respect to each source’s weaknesses, strengths, and interrelationships regarding the discourse being discussed; and, fourth, Critically evaluating and offering original ideas in the research results vis-à-vis previous discourses by presenting new findings that combine differing lines of thought on the “research problem.”¹⁶

The explanation of these four activities begins with systematic recording of all findings relevant to the research problem from each source read whether empirical findings, theoretical ideas, or new hypotheses. This process involves creating structured notes or quotation extracts that cite source, page, and context so that the trace of information remains clear for verification and citation. Good practices at this stage include building a reference database, writing brief summaries of each article, and noting initial ideas to facilitate subsequent analysis. The second step leads to synthesis: combining recorded findings into an integrated summary that reveals patterns, consensus, and differences among sources. At this stage the researcher constructs a thematic framework or concept map that groups similar ideas and ties them to the theoretical framework used. The synthesis result is not merely a listing; rather it attempts to synthesize diverse contributions to present an overall picture of the state of knowledge on the researched topic.

After synthesis, the researcher conducts a critical analysis of the quality and relationships among sources: assessing methods, data reliability, biases, temporal/geographic coverage, and research gaps. This analysis maps each source’s strengths and limitations and identifies contradictions or areas where evidence corroborates. In this way, the researcher can show how each finding contributes to collective knowledge and

¹⁵ Rizaldy Fatha Pringgar and Bambang Sujatmiko, “Penelitian Kepustakaan (Library Research) Modul Pembelajaran Berbasis Augmented Reality Pada Pembelajaran Siswa,” *Jurnal IT-EDU* 05, no. 01 (2020).

¹⁶ Milya Sari and Asmendri, “Penelitian Kepustakaan (Library Research) Dalam Penelitian Pendidikan IPA,” *Penelitian Kepustakaan (Library Research) Dalam Penelitian Pendidikan IPA* 2, no. 1 (2018).

determine the weight of arguments to be built in the paper. The final stage is offering constructive critique of the existing discourse and formulating the study’s original contribution, for example reinterpretation of a theory or passage, combining previously separate perspectives, or proposing a future research agenda. Here the researcher links the analytical results to the research questions so that recommendations or conclusions based on the literature emerge. Critical ideas must be measurable and consistent with the data and methods used. The library-research method is chosen because this study is conceptual-historical in nature and aims to examine the presence and variety of multicultural values in Confucian documents as well as related academic literature. Research data are sourced from journals, prior reviews, school textbooks, and Khonghucu religious texts to examine how the concept of multicultural education appears from the perspective of Confucianism (Khonghucu) in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, which connect Confucian perspectives on multiculturalism with the characteristics and values promoted by UNESCO for multicultural education, are illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Multicultural Concept in Confucianism

No	Multicultural Concept in Confucianism	Characteristics of Multicultural Education	Core Multicultural Education Values (UNESCO)
1	Openness to Other Cultures (Shu / Empathy)	• Democracy; Equality; Justice	• Tolerance • Democracy • Equality
2	Humanity Rooted in Ren (Humaneness)	• Humanity; Togetherness; Peace; • Attitudes of recognizing, accepting, and valuing diversity	• Tolerance • Justice
3	Zhong (The Mean) — Harmonizing Differences	• Humanity; Togetherness; Peace; • Attitudes of recognizing, accepting, and valuing diversity	• Justice • Equality

Based on the table above, it is evident that there is a relevant alignment between Confucian multicultural concepts and the characteristics and multicultural values identified. The results indicate that Confucian views on multiculturalism are closely linked to the characteristics of multicultural education as formulated by Abdullah Aly, as well as the core values recommended by UNESCO. Further discussion of these findings is outlined as follows:

First. Openness to Other Cultures (*Shu* / Empathy)

According to Confucian teachings, openness to other cultures is represented by the principle of *shu* (恕), which reflects empathy, humility, and an interest in cultural diversity. This value is emphasized in the *Analects of Confucius* through expressions such as: “Within the four seas, all men are brothers” (Lun Yu XII:5).¹⁷ This supports two main characteristics of multicultural education—democracy, equality, and justice. This principle views all human beings as having equal dignity and worth. Thus, Confucius offers a definition of empathy through the statement: “What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others.”

Openness to other cultures also reflects UNESCO’s core values of tolerance, democracy, and equality, which encourage respect for differences in religion, ethnicity, race, and opinion. This principle is highly relevant in plural societies such as Singapore and Indonesia, where intercultural harmony forms the foundation for maintaining social stability and national progress. In practice, the principle of *shu* should be translated into learning strategies that foster intercultural dialogue, including interfaith engagement. Learning activities may include community service projects to cultivate students’ empathy or initiatives that bring together students from diverse backgrounds. Teachers serve as role models of the *shu* concept by demonstrating empathetic behavior, guiding inclusive discussions, and designing assignments that assess students’ tolerance and appreciation of differences—not merely mastery of content..

The *shu* principle, as an ethical foundation emphasizing empathy and care for others, must be implemented in systematic and measurable educational practices to achieve tangible impacts. This means designing learning activities that facilitate perspective-taking, structured intercultural dialogue, and community service projects that bring students from diverse backgrounds into meaningful interaction, enabling empathy to be cultivated in real social contexts. A study by Tang and Yu (2023) showed that Confucian concepts such as *shu* can be understood as “due consideration,” which promotes attentiveness and caution toward the needs of others, making it well-suited as a principle for inclusive learning.¹⁸ Furthermore, theoretical studies affirm that *shu* is empathy, which according to Xunzi is a virtue an excellent trait that determines one’s attitudes, emotions, actions, and relationships with others. It can be concluded that *shu* can be implemented in schools through strategies such as role-taking, empathy-based pedagogy, and a global citizenship education curriculum.¹⁹ At the institutional level, implementing *shu* requires school

¹⁷ Bratayana Ongkowijaya, ed., *Kitab Lun Yu* (gentanusanantara.com, 2012).

¹⁸ Yan Tang and Zhiping Yu, “Towards Others: Confucian *Shu*’s (Due Consideration) Three Types of Gongfu (Practice),” *Religions* 14, no. 7 (June 23, 2023): 824, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070824>

¹⁹ Charlene Tan and Priya Goel La Londe, “Empathy as a Virtue: A Confucian Interpretation and a Tool to Address Anti-Asian Hate Crime,” *Critical Studies in Education* 65, no. 2 (March 14, 2024):

policies that support diversity (e.g., culturally sensitive calendars, anti-discrimination policies, and the strengthening of multicultural curricula), so that the values of empathy become part of the educational structure, not merely additional content. In this way, *shu* not only enriches the ethical dimension of multicultural education but also provides an operational tool for shaping citizens who can live harmoniously in a pluralistic society.

Field findings highlight the importance of supporting teachers who have received multicultural training so they can fully implement multicultural teaching practices through classroom management strategies, collaborative task design, and techniques for facilitating balanced dialogue.²⁰ Classical textual studies also remind us that *shu* is positioned by Confucius as a fundamental requirement for those who wish to live a virtuous life; this strengthens the argument that empathy is not merely a social skill but a moral foundation in education.²¹ Empirical evidence in school contexts also shows that the integration of multicultural content and empathy exercises enhances students' ability to appreciate differences and understand others' perspectives, which in turn fosters a tolerant attitude.²²

Second. Humanity Rooted in Ren 仁 (Humaneness)

The concept of ren (仁), meaning humaneness or benevolence, emphasizes the importance of building relationships grounded in compassion and respect for others regardless of religion, ethnicity, or race. An example of the emphasis on humaneness is found in the Analects: "A junzi (noble person) can be at harmony though not identical; a mean person can be identical though not in harmony" (Lun Yu XIII:23).

In the context of multicultural education, ren supports principles of tolerance and justice. This value stresses that every individual, despite differences in culture and worldview, has an equal right to be respected and treated fairly. This aligns with UNESCO's conception of justice, which calls for impartial treatment irrespective of differences in skin color, religion, or background. At its core, ren affirms a universal humanity: "to love others" as the primary principle; alongside it are injunctions such as "do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire" and "help others to take their stand insofar as you yourself wish to take your stand, and lead others there insofar

162–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2023.2249057>.

²⁰ Eun Jeong Jun, "Multicultural Education Course Put into Practice," *Multicultural Education Review* 8, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 83–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615X.2016.1184921>.

²¹ Tiziana Lippiello, "A Confucian Adage for Life: Empathy (Shu) in the Analects - CORE," *Light a Candle. Encounters and Friendship with China: Festschrift in Honour of Angelo Lazzarotto P.I.M.E.*, 2010, 73–97.

²² Amal Mohammed Ali Al-Mannai, Hala Essa Al Marzooq, and Wafa Jawad Al-Arrayed, "Incorporating Multicultural Education in the Classroom: Benefits for Global Citizenship," *International Journal of Educational Research* 1, no. 1 (2024): 08–13, <https://doi.org/10.62951/ijer.v1i1.12>.

as you yourself wish to be led.” These elements constitute the essence of ren and serve as practical foundations for an educational ethic.²³ This meaning is directly relevant to multicultural education because it provides a normative basis: learners are taught to view peers as morally valuable subjects rather than stereotyped objects. Thus, ren is not merely an emotional norm but a behavioral standard that demands recognition of rights, respect, and moral consideration across groups, particularly within educational settings.

Pedagogically, applying ren shifts teaching focus from mere knowledge transfer to building ethical relations among students. Education grounded in ren promotes classroom practices such as reflective discussions on experiences of difference, perspective-taking exercises, and cross-cultural collaborative assignments that emphasize care and mutual responsibility. This aligns with findings that integrating multicultural values in schools — such as tolerance and appreciation of diversity — enhances students’ social skills and inclusive attitudes. Internalizing these values requires the simultaneous involvement of the environment, teachers, students, and curriculum. As Firdaus (2019) concluded, the success of the internalization process depends on mutual support among knowledge, processes, and acceptance of multicultural values.²⁴

At the policy and system level, the value of ren provides an ethical emphasis for shaping curricula oriented toward human dignity as the primary foundation of multicultural education. In practice, countries with Confucian cultural heritage such as Singapore have adapted shu and ren in civic education to foster mutual respect and social responsibility among communities. Wu et al. note that a multicultural citizen is one who is open to other cultures, guided by shu (empathy), and upholds a universal sense of togetherness rooted in ren (humaneness).²⁵

Meanwhile, in Indonesia, Raihani (2014) emphasizes the importance of aligning national education policy, curriculum, and school-level practice to form tolerant, multicultural citizens. In her article she asserts that multicultural education is vital to cultivate values that support cultural and religious diversity.²⁶ Practical applications of ren in education can be implemented through: (1) curricula that include case studies on cross-cultural humanistic values; (2) active learning methods such as moral discussion and

²³ Zhongying Shi, “Confucius’ s Concept of Ren and Its Application in Education,” *E-Journal of Philosophy of Education: International Yearbook of the Philosophy of Education Society of Japan*, 3 (2018): 1–12.

²⁴ Firdaus Firdaus, Dian Kurnia Anggreta, and Faishal Yasin, “Internalizing Multiculturalism Values Through Education: Anticipatory Strategies For Multicultural Problems And Intolerance In Indonesia,” *Jurnal Antropologi: Isu-Isu Sosial Budaya* 01, no. June (2020): 131–41, <http://jurnalantropologi.fisip.unand.ac.id/>.

²⁵ Wu, Tan, and Ng, “Educating Multicultural Citizens from a Confucian Heritage: Examples from Singapore.”

²⁶ R. Raihani, “Education for Multicultural Citizens in Indonesia: Policies and Practices,” *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 48, no. 6 (2018): 992–1009, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2017.1399250>

project-based social learning; (3) the teacher's role as a moral exemplar demonstrating fairness and empathy; and (4) evaluation systems that measure not only cognitive aspects but also the development of students' multicultural attitudes, among other measures.

Based on the above discussion, the value of *ren* in Confucianism fully aligns with the characteristics of multicultural education as described by Banks and UNESCO, especially the values of humanity, justice, and tolerance. By placing *ren* at the heart of education, schools do not merely instill procedural tolerance but also shape students' character so that they see one another as members of a shared human family who are equal and supportive. Thus, *ren* becomes not only an Eastern philosophical heritage but also a practical tool in building a peaceful and just plural society through education.

Third. Harmonizing Differences with the Concept of *Zhong* (中)

The concept *zhong* (中) literally means "the middle." Here the middle implies balance and proportionality. Consider, for example, a band performing a song: each member plays a different instrument; drums, bass, lead guitar, keyboard and each musician has a distinct role according to the instrument. Although roles differ, they must be played in harmony with the set tune. No one should vie to dominate or step beyond agreed boundaries. If all musicians perform their parts well, musical harmony emerges.

This musical analogy can be used to describe harmonious multicultural life. Although each person has different roles, professions, tastes, religions, and ethnicities, they should remain centered (*zhong*) acting in proportion to their role without exceeding limits. Psychologically, a *zhong* mental state is one in which a person can control desires, emotions, and impulses. Through the concept of *zhong*, harmony in multicultural life is thus expected to arise. Essentially, *zhong* guides proportional action: it mediates between two extremes to achieve ethical and practical balance. In a multicultural context, *zhong* functions as a principle for regulating the proportion between identity freedom and social obligations, placing group demands and individual interests at an appropriate scale so that intergroup interactions do not trigger domination or oppression..

Other research focuses on the basic meaning of *zhongyong*, that is, to "master the extremes but deploy the mean." In other words, when faced with a controversial issue, one should consider various perspectives in depth and make decisions that take into account both the overall situation and the self. This brief quotation underscores that *zhong* is not passive but an active process of assessing perspectives and selecting proportional actions in plural situations.

Pedagogically, *zhong* encourages designing learning that balances cultural representation, student voice, and allocation of discussion time so that no group dominates classroom narratives. This approach aligns with research indicating *zhong* as a

thinking style that teaches moderation and affective regulation. Wu and Lin (2005) define *Zhongyong* thinking as considering matters from multiple aspects and making appropriate decisions for the whole situation.²⁷ *Zhongyong thinking* is also related to cognitive and affective regulation in students. In practice at school, this means teachers should manage classroom dynamics: provide space for minorities, curb majority dominance, and facilitate productive dialogue so that learning outcomes are not only cognitive but also ethical achieving harmony without ignoring difference.

Harmony differs from complete agreement because it is mutually beneficial to the parties involved, which is enabled by their creative dynamics. Therefore, unlike sameness, which eliminates difference and diversity, harmony presupposes them.²⁸ Thus, through the concept of *zhong*, Confucian teachings can help realize social harmony through appreciation of difference. Examples of *zhong* application in multicultural settings are found in civic education practices in Confucian Heritage Cultures. Studies on citizenship education in Singapore recommend the use of Confucian values, including *shu*, *ren*, and *zhong*, to cultivate citizens who are open yet responsible, guided by empathy and humanity.²⁹ This indicates that *zhong* is not merely an ethical theory but can be translated into curriculum programs that emphasize balanced voice and the protection of rights.

The findings of this study conclude that Confucian education contains multicultural values. The concept of multicultural education from a Confucian perspective is articulated particularly through the concepts of *shu* (empathy), *ren* (humaneness), and *zhong* (harmonious mean), all of which have significant relevance to multicultural education. The principle of *shu* emphasizes openness to other cultures by demonstrating cross-cultural empathy, supporting multicultural characteristics such as democracy, equality, and tolerance. This is pertinent for plural societies like Singapore and Indonesia, where intercultural harmony is a key to social success and national development. Meanwhile, the concept of *ren* reinforces universal human values, stressing the importance of compassion and respect for others regardless of cultural, religious, or racial differences. This concept aligns with UNESCO's value of justice, which calls for fair treatment of every individual. Thus, Confucian teachings can serve as an ethical framework that supports the implementation of multicultural education in the era of globalization. The concept of *zhong* promotes an open, proportional mode of thinking, teaching moderation and emotional regulation as means to achieve harmony. In the context of multicultural

²⁷ Zhou and Li, "Zhongyong Thinking Style and Resilience Capacity in Chinese Undergraduates: The Chain Mediating Role of Cognitive Reappraisal and Positive Affect."

²⁸ Pak-Hang Wong, "Dao, Harmony and Personhood: Towards a Confucian Ethics of Technology," *Philosophy & Technology* 25, no. 1 (March 9, 2012): 67–86, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-011-0021-z>.

²⁹ Wu, Tan, and Ng, "Educating Multicultural Citizens from a Confucian Heritage: Examples from Singapore."

education, *zhong* thinking should be cultivated in schools to instill values that enable wise acceptance and appreciation of difference.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that Confucian teachings—through *shu* (empathy), *ren* (humaneness), and *zhong* (mean/harmony) offer a value framework that is both relevant and applicable to contemporary multicultural education. These three concepts are complementary: *shu* fosters openness and perspective-taking; *ren* places human dignity at the moral center of education; while *zhong* provides operational principles to balance differences so that social harmony can be achieved without erasing plurality. By integrating these three, education not only teaches procedural tolerance but also forms citizens who are responsible, reflective, and prudent in public life.

The practical implications for education are clear. At the curriculum level, Confucian values can inform the design of materials that present diverse perspectives, cross-cultural case studies, and activities that nurture empathy and commitment to justice. In the classroom, teachers should be equipped with the competence to facilitate inclusive dialogue, assess students' affective development, and manage group dynamics so that minority voices are not silenced. Participatory and contextual pedagogies such as project-based learning, community service, and role simulations are consonant with the spirit of *shu* and *ren*, because they provide concrete practice spaces for internalizing multicultural values.

At the institutional and policy levels, applying Confucian values requires synergy among national policy, curriculum implementation, and school practice. Schools need to adopt internal policies sensitive to diversity e.g., academic calendars that accommodate major community festivals, anti-discrimination guidelines, and mechanisms for family/community participation in education. Policymakers should design sustained teacher-training programs that emphasize affective competencies and intercultural facilitation skills and provide resources that enable consistent multicultural practice across different regional contexts. Assessment must not be neglected: measuring the success of multicultural education should go beyond cognitive outcomes and include affective and conative indicators such as empathy, openness, cross-cultural collaboration skills, and sensitivity to injustice. Clear rubrics and behavioral observation instruments need to be developed so that the internalization of values can be systematically monitored and evaluated. Periodic evaluation is also important to refine program design and tailor interventions to each school's contextual needs.

Potential misuse of these concepts should also be anticipated. For example, *zhong* misunderstood as a call for passivity or toleration of injustice must be guarded against by

underscoring that the desired “middle way” is proportional and just not a compromise that ignores rights violations. Therefore, multicultural education grounded in Confucian values must always balance respect for difference with a firm commitment to truth and justice.

Further research is needed to integrate Confucian perspectives within multicultural education contexts in various countries, including Indonesia. This aims to explore the adaptive potential of principles such as *shu*, *ren*, and *zhong* in formal and non-formal curricula to raise diversity awareness. Interdisciplinary approaches involving philosophy, education, and cultural studies can enrich future inquiry. Governments and educational institutions are also advised to draw on Confucian teachings as inspiration for building social harmony within increasingly plural societies. Through training for educators and students in the values of *shu* and *ren*, inclusive and tolerant learning environments can be fostered, ultimately contributing to a more just and cultured global society. Lastly, longitudinal empirical studies and action research are recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions based on *shu*, *ren*, and *zhong* across educational levels. Such research should involve stakeholders, teachers, students, parents, and policymakers and employ both quantitative and qualitative instruments to measure changes in attitudes, behaviors, and school practices. The development of teacher-training modules, contextualized learning materials, and standardized evaluation guides will facilitate program replication across regions. Continuous monitoring and reflective practice are crucial so that adaptations of Confucian values remain responsive to local social dynamics and produce tangible impacts on strengthening multicultural harmony.

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