



## Confucian Leadership in Millennial Character Building

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### Abstract

The problems to be discussed in this research are based on the phenomenon of searching for millennial leadership character education in Indonesia. In recent years, Western theories have dominated the trend of studying leadership and are rarely derived from Eastern wisdom. These influenced leadership education taught in character education in the education curriculum. Meanwhile, the East has Confucianism, a leadership concept called Jun Zi. Jun Zi explained how a person has the virtue of acting as a leader for himself and others. The research method used was the interview method, with the main object of discussion obtained from a comparative analysis of Confucian literature. The limitation of this study is the need for more Confucian wisdom texts in Indonesian, so to facilitate the objectives of this study, it is necessary to develop studies in the original language texts of these teachings. Subsequent research described Jun Zi's suitability with the needs of leadership character education in Indonesia, especially for millennials who have experienced various choices of new leadership models.

**Keywords** *Confucianism, Leadership, Millennials, Character Building*

### INTRODUCTION

Young people in Indonesia need help determining attitudes in studying character building, ultimately, in leadership (Masrukhin, 2013). One is the need for a suitable leadership model for a pluralistic society in Indonesia. This case is exacerbated by the many offers of new leadership models that at some points are not or have not been by the lifestyle of Eastern society, some of which are authoritarian and seniority leadership models. Lider and Dantes stated that in character education, aspects of cultural values and national character are needed that can be easily found in the context of millennials' lives (Lider & Dantes, 2019). Several leadership models commonly taught or disseminated in Indonesia include autocracy, democracy, and laissez-faire leadership (Iqbal, 2021). Although these leadership methods can be learned and practised in Indonesia, Indonesia still needs new alternative leadership methods. Considering the condition of a pluralistic society in Indonesia, these leadership models need to be considered. This research aims to add alternative discourses for developing character education implemented in educational institutions.

Millennials themselves need help with studying leadership (Masrukhin, 2013). For example, leadership lessons are obtained from extracurricular classes such as marching and scouting at the elementary and middle school levels. Meanwhile, at the higher education level, although there are not many higher education institutions that teach about leadership and character building, the knowledge of leadership itself is usually taught only through the success stories of specific figures (whether in political history, the business world, or intellectuals) and motivational teachings (Harahap, 2019). This model is a form of impoverishment of insight into leadership. Meanwhile, with the many models of leadership and ideologies that have developed in this free information era, millennials in Indonesia need alternative offers close to Eastern traditions (Guntama, 2019).

This research still has drawbacks, namely that not all educational institutions emphasize character education, especially theories based on Eastern philosophy. This research further proposes to study the nature of Jun Zi's leadership contained in Confucian teachings. Confucianism

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is a philosophical teaching that emerged around the sixth century BC. This teaching tells various things about ethics, science, to spiritualism. Nevertheless, along with the shifting interests of people living in society, Confucianism is often used to help examine proper ethics in living conditions together. In Indonesia, Confucianism is recognized as a classical Asian philosophical system, belief system, or religion. The Indonesian government, since the time of Abdurrahman Wahid's leadership in 2000-2001, has recognized Confucianism as one of the official religions in Indonesia, which in Indonesian is referred to as Confucianism. This recognition is a great joy for the adherents of the teachings of Confucianism, both who adopt it as a religious behaviour and study it as a moral-philosophical teaching. Several decades earlier, Confucianism could not be spread freely because there was a rejection from the previous leadership regime for Chinese traditions and teachings in Indonesia.

This development received a warm welcome from the people of Indonesia. Confucian adherents have been able to worship and express their beliefs. On the other hand, Confucian teachings have also been supported by adequate infrastructure. The existence of the Confucian religion makes Indonesian people free to study Confucian teachings both formally and informally. Many books on Confucian teachings have been circulated and confirmed as one of the teachings of wisdom that can be applied in Indonesia. This existence encourages researchers to seek an understanding of the leadership model and character building contained in Jun Zi for millennials in Indonesia.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this study, Confucianism will be seen explicitly as a system of teaching policy or philosophy. This consideration was chosen because, in Confucianism, there are universal teachings, meaning that it can be done by everyone regardless of whether the person is a Confucian adherent. This teaching has a value called Jun Zi, or human virtue. According to the teachings of Confucius, humans can reach their maximum if they have achieved virtue according to Jun Zi's criteria. This teaching means that humans can be considered perfect not when they have reached heaven, or things are non-physical but when they have achieved a good attitude.

The background of Jun Zi's teachings is profit gain, where profit is not only material gain but also spiritual gain. Asian philosophy developed a lot to apply this, where there is a balance between the material and immaterial world. Jun Zi himself focuses on three fundamental aspects of Confucian virtue ethics, including Ren (仁 virtue), yi (义 righteousness), and li (礼 ritual propriety), which focus on status and material gain, although essential but not a significant concern (Li et al., 2022). Jun Zi's concept is based on the three considerations above, where virtue is determined by the condition of the soul and the teaching system, truth is determined by practical and critical attitudes and ritual propriety is determined by one's spiritual attitude in behaviour and knowledge of the world and its origins.

Some of Jun Zi's criteria need to be directly explained definitively in the text of Confucius' conversation, but in the conversation, Confucius expresses a picture of Jun Zi's attitude. Some of these fragments include: "Jun Zi has nine types of behaviour to be discussed. When facing a problem, we must clearly understand the problem. When hearing people speak, they must pay attention to what is said; their appearance should be warm and friendly—respectful to everyone. If something is not clear, we must dare to ask. If we are angry, we must think about the consequences afterwards. If we face a profit in front of our eyes, we must first consider whether the profit is reasonable." (Wang, 2012a).

Through these nine criteria, there is a conclusion that rationality and thinking more are attitudes that must be prioritized. Another quote from Confucius states, "Every time you take action, you need to think again three times." (Wang, 2012a). In other words, Jun Zi is both a strong and

skilled person and a considerate, caring person. Here, a Jun Zi requires a person who maximizes their thinking potential. Regarding thoughts, Confucius also stated that a Jun Zi would feel ashamed if his words went beyond what he had done. Jun Zi means that a person should not overestimate himself through words but through attitude. Furthermore, this self-exaltation is not done for oneself but for the benefit of the people.

Jun Zi is one of the characteristics of transformative leadership, where goodness is not intended for oneself but for the benefit of many. This teaching significantly influenced Chinese civilization's development until the collective spirit became the basic ethics taught in the Confucian tradition (Yuan et al., 2022). Jun Zi's transformative leadership can also be applied in broader leadership practices, such as business and politics. The main goal is to create Harmony (Snell et al., 2022) between body and soul, individual and society, needs and pleasures, and natural and ideal conditions.

The five conditions of Jun Zi's leadership include virtue or humanity called Ren (仁), truth or worthiness referred to as Yi (義), knowledge of the harmonic property known as Li (禮), wisdom management as Zhi (智), also trust and integrity known as Xin (信) (Cua, 2007). With these five conditions, to harmonize all aspects of life and a rational attitude in thinking and acting (Lusiana et al., 2022), the teachings of Confucianism should be a reference for leadership character development education.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research method used in this study is the analysis of phenomena and the comparison of literacy, which has the main object (Guntama, 2019), namely Confucian philosophy, especially the concept of Jun Zi. This research refers to the results of online interviews through Zoom Meetings from April to June 2022 from previous research conducted by internal institutions that have not been published in journals regarding the various opinions of several respondents regarding their hopes in learning various millennial leadership concepts. 11 respondents with an age range of 21-34 were selected based on their role in the world of education, including character building educators (2 people), 6th-semester students (7 people), and HRD start-up companies that often employ fresh graduates/millennials (2 people). In the interview, the respondents agreed that the essence of existing leadership had led little to the self-cultivation process of a leader. The interview strengthens this research to explore Eastern leadership teachings, especially those in Confucian philosophy, as part of character development education materials. The research written in this paper was conducted from January to March 2023 through several stages, including observing phenomena, designing problems, collecting interview results, compiling literature, and analyzing literature.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Millennial Leadership**

In response to globalization and the internet era, there was a category of society, namely millennial society. Millennial society refers to youth or people aged 17-35, where the productive age has positioned them as one of the most influential community groups in developing a larger society (Masrukhin, 2013). Millennials are also synonymous with youth who know various aspects of the Internet of Things and have high creativity. Problems that may develop in the lives of millennials, such as professional crises, bullying, sexual violence, hoaxes, atheism, and social class gaps, are questions that must be shared, both by the actors and the initiators of education. These cases can be minimized or solved through good education, for example, regarding self-understanding, understanding trust, understanding social contracts, and understanding values (Harahap, 2019). The education system also interacts directly with millennials so that the condition

of millennials can be directed through a sound education system. Millennials have the potential to be the nation's first development actors; this is what makes research on millennial character development important.

For millennials, the competence of cooperation with leadership competence. The development of democracy in the field of work professionalism (Farhan, 2021) (not only in the political field) forms a new culture where millennials are aware of the right to an opinion, the right to get commensurate work results, to the right to determine the portion of their work. The latter can be observed in the trend of quitting or the refusal of millennial workers to offer overtime or additional working hours. The millennial generation has also found specific and unique characteristics, as explained by Karmagatri and Hasan, that this generation cannot be separated from the development of the surrounding culture (Karmagatri & Hasan, 2021). Through these phenomena, it is found that millennial society has given birth to its authenticity, not only in cultural identity but also in the world of work.

As one of the responsibilities of education actors, there is an educational commitment called character education or character development. This knowledge is practised in various aspects, such as business and work skills, civic and community education, values education, and spiritualism education. Because of this commitment, it is appropriate if Confucianism, which has taught fundamental moral values and practices, becomes a reference for the framework for developing character education. In addition to the human character in explaining Confucius's teachings, Confucianism has been proven to shape the management style and performance of various business fields and even multinational companies in China, which is now commonly known as transformational leadership. (Hui, 2022). This phenomenon is one of the reasons why Confucianism deserves to be studied as a reference for character development.

### **Building Capacity**

In responding to Jun Zi's wisdom, a millennial must consider character development in skills, creativity, and personal wisdom. Confucian teachings about repeated rational considerations spur one to think deeply about one thing. This teaching increases the power of creativity (Gao et al., 2022) and wisdom. The three things above currently have extensive facilities, such as information technology and broader freedom of expression. A wise person and a leader will think about his world, the origins, and the consequences of the world. Someone will see the world authentically by thinking critically or thinking about something repeatedly. This value is an essential part of capacity building for today's society. A person not only accepts the condition and depends on what he experiences, but he must think deeply about the condition's reasons and good side.

According to the Confucian interpretation of the first, self-development is skill development. The skills referred to in Confucian teachings are not only limited to hand skills, speaking skills, writing, or body processing but also developing initiative (Duan et al., 2022). Leadership character education has teachings about the ability to express opinions. Of course, this opinion is not expected to be someone else's opinion but the opinion of someone speaking. In other words, one's initiative is a skill needed by a leader inspired by Confucian teachings. This skill is exemplified in one Confucius quote where a person must ask what if he does not understand what the other person is saying. In other words, initiative is included in expressing knowledge and ignorance so that a person can increase his capacity.

The second self-development of a leader is creativity. Creativity is generally born from imagination. Wise people can become creative and imaginative in various ways, for example, by respecting history, legends, and classic stories told by parents and wise people. This condition is evident from the development of Chinese literature and the world of cinema, which is global to this

day. Nevertheless, in a more specific context, a leader can develop his/her imagination and creativity if concerned for his environment. With curiosity and rational thinking, a person can process his knowledge of the surrounding environment and produce new, creative ideas. In contemporary terms, this is referred to as innovation.

The third self-development is personal wisdom. One does not need to be recognized as a philosopher to attain virtue. A person, primarily according to Confucianism, has values and moral standards acceptable to his environment. This cognition is contextual; for example, a student can be wise if he knows the values that apply in the world of education; he does not only follow the school curriculum because of necessity but because he knows the importance of education for himself and others. Alternatively, a worker can know the moral value of his work, understand the consequences for himself and his family, and choose to profitably from – and for – others honestly. Some examples of these are typical values found in various teachings.

Nevertheless, the speciality of Confucius' teachings is that personal wisdom can be obtained when a person thinks seriously about everything in him. One can attain ultimate personal wisdom with practical attitudes such as self-reflection, self-discipline, self-study, dedication, and self-improvement (Duan et al., 2022). In other words, the latter's development raises moral standards in a person through fundamental attitudes.

### **Building Boundaries**

In building self-capacity, there are limitations, namely the transfer of personal desires into collective gain. Although self-development is needed to become a leader, Jun Zi in Confucianism advises one to know the limits of such development. The first limitation is the reason, and the second is the goal. These two things seem identical because the reason is the basis for achieving goals. However, in Confucian wisdom, these two things are essential to note.

The first is the reason; the reason is the basis of a decision or action. The limitation of a person to determine the reason is that the basis of his behaviour must be adjusted to the moral ethics that he has previously known. This value means that the reason for a person to behave or develop himself is the existence of moral things that have been known beforehand. For example, for someone trying to manage or establish a company, the reason that encourages him to do this is the understanding that by working, someone can help those around him. Alternatively, other reasons, such as the emergence of the notion that the essence of one's life is to produce something good.

A person can determine his reasons for acting if he understands harmonization. A wise person can be a good leader if he realizes that life is not about himself but his connectivity, environment, or nature. Harmonization will be formed in the attitude when a leader realizes a cosmic life in which there are himself, other people, biotic and abiotic nature, natural laws, and God's destiny. In the leadership proposed by contemporary Confucianism, a progressive leader needs to understand why he needs to take action. Understanding the social and cultural influences that can influence individuals is essential in this aspect of this 'reason' (Chu & Vu, 2021).

The second is the goal or hopes that a leader has after he knows the reason for the thought or attitude to be taken. For example, when a young leader chooses to fight for the spirit of democracy built up in his country's political system, the goals of his struggle must first be formulated. These young leaders can determine their goals, for example, establishing democracy not only in politics but also in the field of education. Alternatively, other goals, for example, fighting for democracy to free the whole society from the opinion of the majority, are detrimental. A leader inspired by Confucianism is vital in determining his goals and those of others (Angle, 2022).

The authenticity of Confucianism in setting goals is an aspect of collectivity. A leader Jun Zi can determine goals if he considers his goals for many people. This authenticity is an important

limitation in self-development. A person can develop themselves, both for reasons and purposes, only for self-interest. a Confucian leader considers the interests of all stakeholders (Chou & Cheng, 2020). In Confucian leadership, a leader needs to implement goals for the benefit of the people. The attitude of prioritizing people's affairs can be transactional and transformational (Jiang et al., 2021). For example, a learning group leader sets learning goals together so that its members can exchange ideas (transactional) and so that members can develop their intelligence (transformational). In short, a wise leader or Jun Zi in Confucianism needs to act objectively (Jiang et al., 2021) and see the problem not through their interests but also the thoughts of many people. This value does not mean that a leader must exclude himself but rather put himself in the same position as others who are his responsibility.

### **Compatibility with Millennial Generation Needs**

The millennial generation has serious challenges both in the field of morality and social behaviour. The two fields are combined in a separate challenge in which they are required to avoid various technological developments and global association temptations. In addition, many millennial youths have decided to play an active role in society, for example, becoming community leaders, influencers, and start-ups. These fields make the moral and social challenges of the millennial generation even more real. Whether intentional or not, millennials have played a significant role in sociotechnical (Lan et al., 2021) or community development. This role is essential to note because there is a generally accepted argument that youth are considered untrained human beings. While in real life, it is seen that the youth or millennial generation has taken on many essential roles in society, and the continuity of their role will be longer than the previous generation. As one of Confucianism's wisdom, Jun Zi becomes essential in dealing with the millennial sociotechnical process to achieve Harmony in today's development.

Jun Zi as a moral standard that can be by millennial conditions includes increasing rational power, critical thinking, and self-control, which is described from the following Confucius statement, "When you are young, your energy is not stable, you must never vent your lust without limits." (Wang, 2012b) and "Respect God's destiny, respect those in position and respect the words of the wise" (Wang, 2012b). In some conditions, the millennial generation is seen as an object that has its authority. Meanwhile, the reason for the growth of the millennial generation is also inseparable from the environment surrounding it, such as aspects of education, family, and the environment around where we live. In applying and developing Jun Zi for the millennial generation, educators or parents must first understand the aspects discussed previously in this study. Harmonization cannot be demanded or imposed on the millennial generation alone but must be realized by other people who already know the ideals of Harmony. In short, to create Jun Zi's leadership, there must be mediation (Lau et al., 2021), especially between Jun Zi's leadership education content and the way Jun Zi's education is delivered.

Learning from the conditions of world development, China, which inherited Confucianism's teachings, has led several developments in technology, culture, knowledge, and economy. Chivalry, honesty, rational, Harmony, critical, and collective attitudes are added values in Jun Zi's leadership teachings applied by China through the Confucian tradition (Ma & Tsui, 2015). This case can be a consideration for why Jun Zi's leadership can be applied in character development education. Through this research, we suggest including several aspects described in this journal regarding the leadership of Jun Zi – Confucianism in the character education of leaders in Indonesia.

Jun Zi's wisdom in leadership character development education needs to be seriously considered because leaders are role models who are required to have reflective and critical awareness (Hennig, 2014). In Jun Zi's wisdom, a person can be trained to be honest about his

shortcomings and other appropriate attitudes possessed by a noble human or an individual leader. In responding to the problems of leadership and the millennial generation in Indonesia, there are main things that need to be considered through Jun Zi's teachings. This suggestion is that in paying attention to the future of society or nation, leaders, first and foremost, must have moral values in themselves. Moral values here are memorized points and moral values born from an individual's consciousness through education and attitude training.

## CONCLUSIONS

One of the goals of character education is to shape students' understanding and attitudes to become leaders for themselves and for those around them. This goal aligns with the expectations of the respondents who have responded to their expectations regarding the development of character education in Indonesia. Several suggestions can be applied in leadership character education or Jun Zi through Confucian philosophy. The proposal relates to the capacity that can be formed and the limits of a leader's attitude. Through Confucian philosophy, a leader is encouraged to maintain subjective will, give himself to the community, and avoid attitudes that conflict with common interests. The main requirement in developing the character of a leader is to maximize rationality, both for himself and others, to create Harmony in all aspects of life around him. According to Confucianism, leadership is a suggestion that can be included in teaching character education, mainly to produce responsible millennial leaders. In general, this study proposes that Jun Zi is a concept that can be used as an alternative character development education in Indonesia. The hope of carrying out this research is that Eastern teachings, including those of Confucius, can be considered teaching materials for character development.

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