



LMPU3192 FALSAFAH & ISU SEMASA

Assignment 1

FCI6 : GROUP B

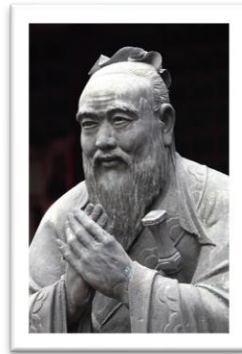
**Title: Ancient Wisdom for a Modern Nation: A
Philosophical Analysis of Confucianism and Its
Relationship with Rukun Negara**

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1.0 Introduction



This paper focuses on Confucius, or rather his Chinese name, Kongfuzi. He is the father of the philosophy of Confucianism, and a notable figure with a deep influence in China, East Asian, and world culture. Confucius has been portrayed as a teacher, advisor, editor, philosopher, reformer, and prophet throughout Chinese history. He was born in 551 BC in China and came from poverty despite having an aristocratic background. When he was young, his father passed away, leaving the family poor, but despite that, Confucius was encouraged to pursue education. It was hard to get into service; however, he found employment with the Jisun clan. As he transitioned to adulthood, Confucius travelled to Lu and worked as an official in the employ of aristocratic families (Csikszentmihalyi and Mark,2024). He was recognized for diplomatic tasks and problem-solving regarding law and order. A wrestle for power between hereditary families and legitimate rulers led to his resignation. Confucius found the families transgressive and was willing to fight to have the power of the ruler restored. However, a clash took place, and the plan to drive the families away backfired, which led to Confucius leaving his position and home.

He went into self-exile for 14 years and turned to teaching his disciples. He believed an ideal world is one without conflict and full of harmony. Confucius aimed at changing society by creating a virtuous government and a society ruled by virtuous people. Furthermore, he also believed family and human relationships are essential (R. Kuing,2008). After his death, his disciples collected his wisdom as The Analects. The Analects is a text containing dialogues and teachings, based on Confucian values such as humanness (REN), propriety (LI), and righteousness (YI).

Confucius' influence in Malaysia can be noted in many ways- our culture, education, and traditions. Confucian values were passed down through Chinese education since the 19th century and were promoted by the Malaysian Chinese immigrants (Lynn-Sze, 2021). According to (Chuah et al., 2016), due to the different historical movements throughout time, Chinese heritages have developed a distinct practice of the Confucian Analects. Furthermore, the immigrant experience and exposure to Western culture in colonised settlements result in traditional Chinese cultures like Confucianism not being properly retained among Malaysian Chinese

2.0 Discussion & Analysis

2.1 Belief in God

The first principle of the Rukun Negara, Belief in God, emphasizes the central role of faith as a guiding force across all aspects of life. It reflects the importance of nurturing a shared moral compass that is firmly rooted in spiritual awareness, accountability, and ethical living. This principle underlines the idea that faith serves not only as a personal foundation but also as a unifying value that strengthens collective responsibility and harmony within society.

In contrast, Confucius himself did not advocate belief in a deity, nor did he prescribe the worship of a God for his followers. While Confucianism does not prohibit religious practice—allowing its adherents to engage in worship if they choose—it does not make it a core requirement. Instead, Confucian thought leans more towards being a political philosophy and a comprehensive ethical framework rather than a religion in the conventional sense. It prioritizes principles such as social harmony, the cultivation of moral character, and the pursuit of ethical governance as the foundation for a stable and virtuous society (Csikszentmihalyi, 2024).

By focusing on these values, Confucianism highlights how ethical behavior and good governance can serve as guiding lights for human conduct, much like faith in God serves as the cornerstone for the Rukun Negara. Both perspectives, though different in their approach, share a common goal of fostering responsibility, morality, and social unity.

2.2 Loyalty to the King and Country

This is the second principle of the pillar of the country *Kesetiaan Kepada Raja dan Negara*. This principle emphasizes the importance of allegiance to the monarchy and the nation. In the context of Malaysia's *Rukun Negara*, it highlights the importance of each and every citizen to have loyalty to *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (YDPA) as the head of state and the kings from each state to ensure a prosperous and unified nation.

This principle can be applied in light of Confucius' philosophy, which offers a framework for understanding the relationship between rulers and citizens. In Confucian ethics, loyalty occupies a central role in sustaining social and political order. However, Confucius viewed true loyalty as not blind obedience but only conditional on the king's virtuous leadership, where the ruler's morality dictated the people's loyalty and the country's stability.

Later, Confucian thought saw a shift from a purely king-centric loyalty to a broader sense of love for country and civic duty, which emphasizes the preservation of national independence alongside service to the state. Citizens are required to actively contribute to peace, social cohesion, and national progress.

In conclusion, the Confucian concept of loyalty demonstrates a historical shift from a ruler-centered virtue to a broader civic ethic that encompasses love for country and duty to society. This transformation resonates strongly with the *Rukun Negara's* principle of *Kesetiaan Kepada Raja dan Negara*, as both highlight loyalty as an ethical commitment not only to authority but also to the nation as a collective moral community.

2.3 Supremacy of the Constitution

The third principle of the Rukun Negara, Keluhuran Perlembagaan (Supremacy of the Constitution), affirms the position of the Federal Constitution as the highest law in Malaysia. It safeguards the rights of citizens, limits the powers of institutions, and provides a framework for justice, harmony, and national unity. By ensuring that all individuals and authorities are subject to the Constitution, this principle establishes a fair and orderly system of governance.

From a Confucian perspective, this principle reflects the value of maintaining order and balance through moral and lawful conduct. Confucius taught that rulers and citizens alike should embody righteousness (yi) and propriety (li) in order to preserve harmony within society. In the same way, the Constitution sets out the rules and values that guide Malaysia's governance, ensuring fairness and accountability for all.

Later interpretations of Confucian thought stressed that maintaining order is not only the duty of rulers but also a shared duty of both leaders and citizens. This aligns with the spirit of Keluhuran Perlembagaan, as it requires everyone to respect the Constitution as a unifying force for the nation.

In summary, Confucius' philosophy of moral order complements the Rukun Negara's principle of Supremacy of the Constitution, as both emphasize that harmony can only be achieved when authority is respected, justice is upheld, and every member of society abides by a common framework of law.

2.4 Rule of Law

The Fourth Principle of the Rukun Negara, the Rule of Law, emphasizes that every citizen is equal before the law and that no one is above it. The government and the people as a whole are bound to uphold and abide by the country's laws. However, Confucius's views on law and governance have significant differences when compared to this modern concept.

For Confucius, the foundation of a stable and harmonious state lies not in a strict legal system (fa), but in the moral quality and character of its leaders (de). He believed that a leader who is noble, just, and ethical will serve as a moral example to the people. When a leader governs by moral example, the people will voluntarily follow out of respect and reverence, thus creating a naturally disciplined society. Conversely, if governance relies solely on laws and punishments, the people might comply out of fear, but they will not develop a sense of shame or the moral consciousness to become good individuals.

Confucius introduced the concept of **li** (禮), which refers to the ethics, customs, propriety, and rituals that regulate all social relationships. Li functions as a set of unwritten rules guiding an individual's behavior according to their role in society, whether as a ruler, a father, or a son. According to him, if everyone understands and practices li in their daily lives, social harmony can be achieved without needing to rely on coercive laws.

Therefore, Confucian Philosophy does not support the "Rule of Law" in the modern sense, where the law itself is the supreme authority. Instead, he places the **moral sovereignty of the leader** as the primary source of state stability. For him, written laws are merely a secondary tool, necessary only when governance based on morality fails. This approach differs from the principle of the Rukun Negara, which establishes the law as the supreme entity that governs both the rulers and the people, regardless of a person's moral status.

2.5 Courtesy and Morality

Confucius' ethical ideas are centered on the cultivation of personal virtue and ethical conduct as the foundation for social harmony. He delineated five central relationships—ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, siblings, and friends—and each was regulated by virtues such as loyalty, filial piety, sincerity, respect, and benevolence (Dung, 2023). Central to his philosophy is the concept of self-cultivation, whereby individuals need to exercise continual self-correction and moral discipline in their daily lives. Confucius believed that society would advance from chaos to peace using this method, with morality, and not coercion, as the guiding force of government and social interaction (Dung, 2023).

This emphasis indeed resonates with the fifth Malaysian national philosophy of Rukun Negara, namely, Courtesy and Morality. Rukun Negara and Confucian ethics both subscribe to the belief that individual behavior has a direct impact on the order and integrity of society. While Confucius insisted on sovereigns ruling through virtue and people cultivating sincerity and righteousness, the Rukun Negara encourages Malaysians to adopt respectfulness, courtesy, and moral integrity in daily life and in civic life. Both schemes are such that morality is not just personal duty but also a communal duty for unity and stability (Dung, 2023).

Further, Confucius' teachings on virtues such as benevolence, loyalty, and sincerity are responsive to the ethical imperative in Malaysia's multicultural society. The Confucian value of Li (ritual propriety), where due conduct is legislated to provide social order, is responsive equally to the Rukun Negara's emphasis on courtesy. Similarly, Ren (benevolence), where concern and compassion are given for others, is responsive to the virtue of morality espoused in Malaysia's national philosophy. Thus, the ethical philosophy of Confucius and the Rukun Negara alike stress the inseparable relationship between virtuous individuals and a harmonious society, reiterating that respect, compassion, and moral conduct are indispensable to social order (Dung, 2023).

3.0 Conclusion

In short, the philosophical thoughts of Confucianism offer an affluent platform to explain and propagate the values of Malaysia's Rukun Negara. Confucius reaffirmed the need for ethical growth, moral leadership, and harmonious human relationships as the foundational pillars of a peaceful community. The values resonate a profound chord with the five pillars of the Rukun Negara—from believing in God to courtesy and morality—stressing that mutual responsibility and individual goodness walk together in building a just and prosperous nation.

While Confucius' doctrines were nurtured out of the sociopolitical turbulence of ancient China, their relevance extends beyond cultural and historical boundaries. In Malaysia, a multicultural state focusing on harmony in diversity, the emphasis on loyalty, justice, propriety, and compassion echoes the Confucian call for moral cultivation and respect in human relationships. The compatibility of Confucian values such as Ren (benevolence) and Li (ritual propriety) with the ideals of Rukun Negara illustrates the timelessness of moral values in preserving social harmony and order.

Lastly, the intersection of Confucian moral philosophy and the Rukun Negara emphasizes the eternity of ancient wisdom in addressing contemporary challenges. Both philosophies cement that a moral society can only be achieved when people internalize ethical practice and extrapolate it into civic, familial, and national obligations. Confucianism thereby transcends being a historical philosophy but a living moral inspiration that boosts Malaysia's philosophical pillars of national identity and vision of unity, justice, and harmony.

4.0 Lesson Learned

Studying the philosophy of Confucius provides several timeless, profound, and practical lessons that can be applied to modern life to foster personal growth, stronger relationships, and a more harmonious society.

1) Embrace Lifelong Learning and Self-Cultivation

Confucius was a firm believer that education was not merely for acquiring skills but for moral self-cultivation. He saw life as a continuous journey of learning, not to accumulate facts, but the goal is to become a *Junzi* (君子) – a person of integrity and wisdom. He famously outlined his own developmental journey in The Analects, stating, *"At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning. At thirty, I stood firm."* This teaches us that we should constantly strive for self-improvement, reflect on our actions, and seek knowledge to become better individuals. This illustrates that self-improvement is a lifelong process. The goal is to internalize virtues so deeply that one acts morally and wisely without conscious effort, achieving a state of harmony with *Tian* (Heaven). Thus, personal development is the first step toward creating a better society. For instance, a software developer who, after mastering a programming language, doesn't stop there. She actively seeks to learn new coding frameworks, studies project management principles, and takes courses on effective communication. She understands that her role is not just about writing code but about being a better team member and problem solver. This continuous pursuit of knowledge and skills is a modern application of Confucian self-cultivation, aiming for excellence in her professional and personal life.

2) The Family is the Foundation of Society

Confucianism places immense importance on the family unit and the virtue of filial piety (*Xiao*, 孝), is more than just obedience; it is a deep-seated respect and gratitude towards one's parents and ancestors. Confucius argued that the family is the first and most important school for moral development. If an individual cannot demonstrate loyalty, respect, and duty within their own household, they cannot be expected to function as a responsible citizen or a loyal official in the nation. He believed a well-ordered family is the microcosm of a well-ordered nation. This lesson reminds us to value and strengthen our family bonds, as they are the primary school for learning virtues like respect, loyalty, and compassion. For example, a young boy who moves to a new city for work but makes a consistent effort

to stay connected with his family. He schedules weekly video calls with his parents, manages their finances responsibly to offer support if needed, and travels home for important family events. By honouring his role as a son, he is practicing Xiao. This strengthens the family unit and reinforces the values of responsibility and mutual care that are essential for a stable community.

3) Lead by Moral Example

Confucius was a strong advocate for *Rule by Virtue* (*De*, 德) over *Rule by Law* (*Fa*, 法) and punishment. He believed that a leader's greatest tool is their own moral character. A virtuous leader acts like the *"North Star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it."* People will naturally follow and be inspired by a leader who is benevolent, just, and self-disciplined. Forcing compliance through strict rules may control behaviour temporarily, but it will not win the hearts of the people or inspire them to internalize a sense of what is right. Confucius taught that a leader's power comes from their moral authority, not their position. Whether in government, business, or the family, a true leader inspires others through their own virtuous conduct. This principle teaches us that integrity, honesty, and empathy are essential qualities of leadership and that our actions have a powerful influence on those around us. For example, a local community leader who wants to address a littering problem. Instead of immediately pushing for fines and penalties, she organizes a weekly cleanup event and participates in it herself, picking up trash alongside other residents. Her visible commitment and hard work inspire others to take pride in their neighbourhood. This moral leadership is far more effective at changing long-term behaviour than threats of punishment.

4) Practice Empathy and Reciprocity

Central to Confucius's concept of benevolence (*Ren*, 仁) is the Confucian "Golden Rule," also known as *Shu* (恕), or reciprocity, is a powerful guide for ethical behaviour. When asked by a disciple for a single word that could guide one's life, Confucius chose *Shu*, explaining: *"What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."* By considering how our actions affect others and treating them with the same respect we desire for ourselves, we can foster harmony and reduce conflict. This "Golden Rule" is the practical application of empathy. It requires you to place yourself in another's position and consider their feelings and perspectives before you act. It is the foundation for all harmonious and

ethical human interaction. This lesson encourages us to cultivate empathy and build relationships based on mutual understanding and kindness. For example, during a heated business negotiation, a manager realizes the other party is becoming defensive. Instead of pressing her advantage, she pauses and considers what might be causing their anxiety — perhaps fear of job security or pressure from their superiors. Acknowledging their concerns, she says, "I understand you have your team's interests to protect, just as I have mine. Let's find a solution where we can both walk away feeling secure." By practicing Shu, she transforms a confrontational situation into a collaborative one.

5) Fulfil Social Responsibilities

The doctrine of the *Rectification of Names* (正名) states that everyone should live up to the roles and titles they hold. A ruler must act like a ruler, a father like a father, and so on. This teaches us the importance of understanding and fulfilling our duties within our community and society. By taking our responsibilities seriously, we contribute to social order and collective well-being. When people fail to fulfil the duties of their titles, social chaos and moral decay follow. This principle underscores the importance of accountability and integrity in every position one holds in society. For example, a doctor who does more than just diagnose illnesses and prescribe medicine. She understands that her role as a "doctor" includes being a compassionate listener, a clear communicator who explains complex conditions to patients and their families, and an advocate for her patients' well-being within the healthcare system. By fully embodying the duties of her profession, she is practicing the *Rectification of Names* and contributing to a more caring and effective healthcare environment.

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