



Original Article

Harmony (和): Concepts and Practice of Health in Confucius Philosophy Provided for People with Diseases

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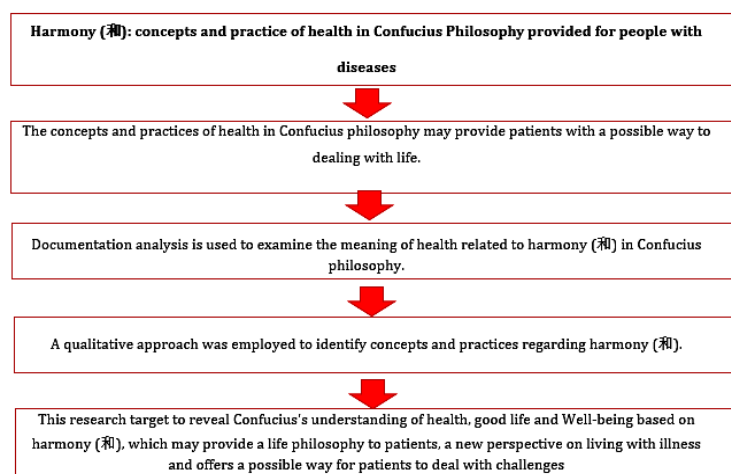
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ABSTRACT

The concepts and practices of health in Confucius philosophy may provide patients with a possible way to dealing with life. This study aimed at exploring Confucius's understanding of health, good life, and well-being related to harmony. Documentation analysis was used to examine the meaning of health-related to harmony in Confucius philosophy. A qualitative approach was employed to identify concepts and practices regarding harmony. This research revealed Confucius's understanding of health, good life, and well-being based on harmony, which may provide a life philosophy to patients, a new perspective on living with illness, and offers a possible way for patients to deal with challenges.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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Introduction

The Confucian concept of health is considered the state of being in harmony with values and rights related to the Confucian ethical principles. And Confucian concepts of the good life were essentially predicated on virtue, which means practice restrained and normative life habits in practice and life. Confucius's philosophy influences Chinese patients' values and beliefs and determines their health, illness, and nursing care perceptions. For the patients, no one can avoid feeling frustrated when suffering from pain. Patients experience physical, psychological, social, and spiritual challenges, particularly with chronic illness. Most people cannot find a good way to deal with new situations with diseases and do not know how to adapt to changed circumstances and reconstruct life with illness. Confucius's Philosophy provides a deeper and broader understanding of life for people suffering from diseases to mediate the psychological conflicts of patients, surmount challenges in external circumstances and get proactive self-balance to live a good life.

The concepts of health and good life related to Harmony in Confucian.

Confucianism is a philosophy of life emphasizing proper human behavior, morality, and man's social responsibilities [1]. The Confucian concept of health is considered as the state of being in harmony [2], which is value and right related to the Confucian ethical principles [3]. Buljan [3] argues that health is understood as a condition that is greater than the mere absence of illness in early Chinese texts. It is considered as the state of being in harmony, a reflection and a result of the appropriate governing of life's breath (qi). Back [4] suggested that Confucian concepts of the good life were essentially predicated on virtue, which means practice restrained and normative life habits in practice and life [5].

Joo [5] examined 'Confucius health view' in 'the Analects of Confucius' and suggested that Confucius regarded 'moral upbringing of oneself' as necessary for health [5]. According to Luo [2], Zhongyong consists of three aspects: Understanding the situations and taking

appropriate action or optimal response (timeliness and harmony), not being biased and going toward the extreme (dynamic balance and equilibrium), and being open to and tolerant of others (empathy). Luo [2] also suggested that in light of their views on happiness and the good life and conclude that Confucius and Mencius each lived a good life that exemplified the three salient features of happiness to that extent they were happy.

The way leading to good life in Confucius Philosophy

One does his best for a good life, but death is not always happy [6] because the desire cannot be consistently fulfilled. There are some practical ways in Confucian to reconcile conflicts in life. An and Lee [7] described that desires are subject to the constraint of ethical desire in Confucian because of an innate understanding. Ja [8] suggested that one may live a healthy life by realizing the nature of mind according to each moral will. In contrast, the other can live dysfunctional life by hiding the moral nature and making inharmony with the world.

Zhixingheyi

Zhixingheyi in Confucian is a way leading to a good life. Firstly, Zhixingheyi can guide people to realize the morale of nature after examining the mind and correcting the meaning [8]. Secondly, it provides inner spiritual power to harmonize life with the world by endowing humans with the moral will to live an entire life. It is not an individual life and allows one to find the meaning of being and its value and provide an opportunity to live humanistic life that loves himself/herself and neighbors and practices the virtues [8]. Thirdly, it encourages people to develop consistency and regularity in daily life's healthful behavior by putting the uniform health-related theories with health-related behavior [9].

Unifying body and spirit

Achieving oneness between our body and spirit is a path to enjoy a healthy and joyful life [10]. Because the distinction between the spirit as a mental substance and the body as a material

substance [22] leads to conflicts between body and spirit, Confucian suggested unifying body and spirit. Some practices in Confucian, such as spirit and body training through archery and horse riding [5], playing music that expresses and controls emotions (writing poetry or singing songs) [5] are meant to achieve mental health.

Zhongyong in Confucian provides a way to reconcile external psychological conflicts. As stated earlier, Zhongyong thinking plays a vital role in regulating mental distress and maintaining subjective well-being [11]. Zhongyong emphasis on interpersonal harmony and connection [7, 11] and relationship harmony was related positively to meaning in life and happiness [12]. For example, Yang, Zhang [11] reported that Zhongyong was significantly correlated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and borderline personality traits and higher levels of self-esteem, well-being, and interpersonal competence [7].

Confucius Philosophy helped to reconstruct good life with diseases

The suffering during the diseases

No one can avoid feeling frustrated [13], especially suffering from diseases [14-16]. Patients experience physical, psychological, social, and spiritual challenges, particularly with chronic illness [17]. For example, patients cannot fulfill cultural expectations of appropriate behaviors as family members contribute to disturbance of interpersonal relationships and failure to fulfill their familial obligations contributes to their diminished self-worth and an increased sense of guilt and shame [18]. These high levels of worry, stress, and anxiety were linked to lower happiness [19]. Edrington and Miaskowski [16] summarized 24 studies of cancer pain in Chinese patients and reported patients who experienced pain related to their disease or treatment. Most of them reported moderate to severe pain and that pain interfered with their normal activities and mood. Wei and Liu [17] evaluated psychosocial and spiritual aspects of breast cancer survivors and concluded that breast cancer survivors experienced physical, psychological, social, and spiritual

challenges. Patients encountered a lot of psychological unbalance because they did not know how to accept situations with diseases, how to adapt to changed circumstances and how to reconstruct life with illness [13, 15, 20].

Confucius philosophy provides a possible way to cope with the suffering

Confucius's Philosophy provides a deeper and broader understanding of the vicissitudes of life [21], especially for people suffering from diseases. Resources in Confucius Philosophy, such as Zhongyong, unifying body and mind help to mediate the psychological conflicts of patients [22]. At the same time, they help surmount challenges in external circumstances [15] and get proactive self-balance to live a good life [23].

Zhongyong's attitude had a more substantial effect on interpersonal competence than psychological flexibility [7]. Hsiao and Klimidis [18] suggested that interpersonal harmony was the critical element of maintaining the patients' mental health because people's well-being is significantly determined by a harmonious relationship with others in the social and cultural context. Particularly, seeking and connecting with others for patients with chronically ill plays a role in the promotion of health and healing Lindsey [20].

Montero-Marin & Perez-Yus [24] suggested that nurturing the mind through meditation practices of unifying body and mind, related a positive psychological adjustment. Chan and Ho [25] worked with Chinese cancer patients and witnessed their growth and resilience. They were motivated to develop an Eastern Body-Mind-spirit Group Intervention model that has a strong emphasis on turning crisis into opportunities and growth through pain. Chan and Ng [26] proposed the body-mind-spirit approach in healthcare settings by using the body-mind-spirit framework flexibly in clinical practice and concluded body-mind-spirit approach trialed with promising results in a number of health conditions and psychosocial predicaments. Leung and Chan [27] ran in-depth interviews with Chinese women with breast cancer and

concluded that meditative practice had important implications for attaining transcendence

Conclusion

The concepts of health and good life related to Harmony in Confucian are proper human behavior, morality, and man's social responsibilities. Confucius regarded 'moral upbringing of oneself' as necessary for health. The way leading to the good life in Confucius Philosophy include Zhixinghey, unifying body, and spirit, Zhongyong. Patients encounter a lot of psychological unbalance because they don't know how to accept the new situations with diseases, adapt to changed circumstances, and reconstruct life with illness. However, Confucius's Philosophy provides a deeper and broader understanding of the vicissitudes of life, especially for people suffering from diseases. Zhongyong, unifying body and mind in Confucius Philosophy can help to mediate the psychological conflicts of a patient.

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Authors' contributions

All authors contributed toward data analysis, drafting and revising the paper and agreed to be responsible for all the aspects of this work.

Conflict of Interest

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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