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Confucianism and Hồ Chí Minh's Thought

Nho giáo và tư tưởng của Hồ Chí Minh

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Abstract

This paper explores the profound influence of Confucianism on the ideological framework of Hồ Chí Minh, a pivotal figure in Vietnam's history. Confucianism, rooted in political ethics and moral education, entered Vietnam early and played a dominant role in shaping its intellectual and social fabric. Hồ Chí Minh, born into a family deeply embedded in Confucian traditions, was extensively exposed to its principles from a young age. This study examines how Hồ Chí Minh adopted and adapted Confucian ideals, particularly its emphasis on moral integrity, education, and the value of people as the foundation of governance. It highlights Hồ Chí Minh's capacity to extract positive elements from Confucian teachings, such as "tu thân" (self-cultivation) and "dĩ dân vi bản" (people as the root), while rejecting outdated doctrines like patriarchal subjugation and hierarchical elitism. The paper also discusses Hồ Chí Minh's synthesis of Confucianism with Marxist-Leninist philosophy to address Vietnam's revolutionary needs. By bridging traditional values with modern ideologies, Hồ Chí Minh crafted a unique philosophical paradigm that harmonized Eastern cultural heritage with Western revolutionary thought, illustrating the enduring relevance of Confucian values in contemporary contexts.

Keywords: Confucianism, cultural integration, Hồ Chí Minh, ideological influence, Vietnamese philosophy.

Introduction

Confucianism, one of the most enduring philosophical traditions in Eastern thought, has profoundly influenced the socio-political and cultural development of East Asian nations, including Vietnam

Tóm Tắt

Bài viết này khám phá ảnh hưởng sâu sắc của Nho giáo đến khuôn khổ tư tưởng của Hồ Chí Minh, một nhân vật quan trọng trong lịch sử Việt Nam. Nho giáo, bắt nguồn từ đạo đức chính trị và giáo dục đạo đức, đã du nhập vào Việt Nam từ sớm và đóng vai trò chủ đạo trong việc định hình cấu trúc trí tuệ và xã hội của đất nước. Hồ Chí Minh, sinh ra trong một gia đình ăn sâu bám rễ vào truyền thống Nho giáo, đã được tiếp xúc rộng rãi với các nguyên tắc của Nho giáo ngay từ khi còn nhỏ. Nghiên cứu này xem xét cách Hồ Chí Minh tiếp thu và điều chỉnh các lý tưởng của Nho giáo, đặc biệt là sự nhấn mạnh vào tính chính trực về mặt đạo đức, giáo dục và giá trị của con người như là nền tảng của sự cai trị. Bài viết nêu bật khả năng của Hồ Chí Minh trong việc trích xuất các yếu tố tích cực từ giáo lý Nho giáo, chẳng hạn như "tu thân" và "dĩ dân vi bản", đồng thời bác bỏ các học thuyết lỗi thời như chế độ gia trưởng và chủ nghĩa tinh hoa phân cấp. Bài viết cũng thảo luận về sự tổng hợp Nho giáo với triết học Mác-Lênin của Hồ Chí Minh để giải quyết các nhu cầu cách mạng của Việt Nam. Bằng cách kết nối các giá trị truyền thống với các hệ tư tưởng hiện đại, Hồ Chí Minh đã tạo ra một mô hình triết học độc đáo, hài hòa di sản văn hóa phương Đông với tư tưởng cách mạng phương Tây, minh họa cho sự liên quan lâu dài của các giá trị Nho giáo trong bối cảnh đương đại.

Từ khóa: Nho giáo, hội nhập văn hóa, Hồ Chí Minh, ảnh hưởng tư tưởng, triết học Việt Nam.

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(Nawrot, 2020; Ulaşan, 2022; Wu & Cao, 2024). Emerging in ancient China during the societal upheavals of the Zhou dynasty's decline, Confucianism was formalized by Confucius (551–479 BCE) during the Spring and Autumn period (771 - 476 BCE), building upon earlier contributions from figures like Duke Zhou (Zhou & Zhang, 2023). It advocated for moral governance, ethical conduct, and the prioritization of collective well-being, aiming to restore social order and prosperity modeled after the Zhou dynasty (Nguyen, Pham et al., 2023).

By the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), Confucianism had become the state ideology in China (Chen, 2024; Liu, 2024), spreading widely across East Asia through cultural and political exchanges. In Vietnam, it entered relatively early, gaining prominence under Chinese domination but only becoming the official doctrine of the state in the 15th century (Nizhnikov & Bac, 2023; Thi Lan, 2022b). For centuries thereafter, Confucian principles emphasizing personal virtue, social harmony, and hierarchical relationships deeply shaped Vietnam's governance, education, and family structures, embedding themselves as central tenets in the spiritual and cultural life of Vietnam's society (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Nguyen, Pham, et al., 2023).

Hồ Chí Minh (1890 – 1969), one of Vietnam's most celebrated leaders, emerged as a revolutionary figure committed to the liberation and modernization of his nation (Fernandez, 2011; Huynh & Cao, 2021; Nguyen, 2024). Born into a family steeped in Confucian tradition, Hồ Chí Minh was exposed to its teachings through both formal and informal education (Ali, 2020). His early exposure to the works of Confucius, Mencius (372 – 289 BCE), and other Confucian scholars fostered a strong moral foundation and an appreciation for the importance of education, ethical leadership, and community welfare.

This paper seeks to explore the extent to which Confucian philosophy influenced Hồ Chí Minh's thought and leadership. Although Hồ Chí Minh later adopted Marxism-Leninism as the ideological cornerstone for Vietnam's independence and socialism, he retained significant elements of Confucianism, demonstrating a selective and pragmatic approach. For instance, he valued Confucianism's emphasis on self-cultivation ("*tu thân*") and governance based on the welfare of the people, while discarding outdated notions such as rigid hierarchies and gender inequality. This adaptability underscores his ability to harmonize traditional values with revolutionary ideals, creating a unique ideological framework tailored to Vietnam's cultural and political landscape.

The introduction provides a historical overview of Confucianism's integration into Vietnamese society, followed by an analysis of its impact on Hồ Chí Minh's personal and ideological development. It also highlights Hồ Chí Minh's innovative approach to blending traditional Eastern philosophies with modern revolutionary ideologies, emphasizing his role as a cultural synthesizer. By examining the works, speeches, and actions of Hồ Chí Minh, this study illustrates how Confucian ideals, adapted to the context of 20th-century Vietnam, shaped his vision for a just and equitable society.

This investigation not only sheds light on Hồ Chí Minh's philosophical evolution but also underscores the relevance of Confucian principles in addressing contemporary challenges. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between traditional values and modern ideologies in the context of national development and social transformation.

Literature Review

Confucianism in Vietnam

Historical context of Confucianism's introduction and development in Vietnam. Confucianism was introduced to Vietnam during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE - 221 AD) as part of Chinese cultural and administrative expansion (Nguyen, Pham, et al., 2023). Initially, it served as a tool for consolidating Chinese domination, laying the groundwork for a hierarchical and centralized governance model (Nguyen, Nguyen et al., 2023; Nguyen, Pham et al., 2023). Over centuries, Confucianism was assimilated into Vietnamese society, evolving into a foundational ideology that shaped political, social, and educational frameworks (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Nguyen, Nguyen, et al., 2023). By the 15th century, during the Lê dynasty, it became the state ideology, influencing governance and moral codes (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Nizhnikov & Bac, 2023).

Confucianism's integration into Vietnam's statecraft brought with it the principles of moral governance and societal harmony. Governance was influenced by Confucian ethics that emphasized the moral rectitude of rulers as a foundation for political stability. Education, modeled after the Chinese Confucian system, included rigorous civil service examinations (Thi Lan, 2022b), which became instrumental in shaping Vietnam's intellectual and administrative elites. Despite its positive contributions, Confucianism perpetuated gender inequality and class stratification, reflecting its feudal origins (Pham et al., 2023).

Its role in shaping Vietnamese governance, education, and cultural values. In governance, Confucianism provided the framework for a paternalistic model where rulers were expected to embody ethical leadership and prioritize the collective good. Confucian values of filial piety, community harmony, and respect for hierarchy were deeply ingrained, ensuring social cohesion. However, this often resulted in rigid societal structures that hindered individual autonomy and social mobility.

Education in Vietnam was heavily influenced by Confucian ideals. The emphasis on moral cultivation alongside intellectual achievement fostered a societal respect for learning and created an administrative class that adhered to Confucian virtues (Nguyen, Pham et al., 2023). However, the hierarchical nature of this system also excluded large segments of the population, particularly women and lower-class individuals, from accessing education and participating in governance.

Culturally, Confucianism shaped Vietnamese family structures and social interactions. It promoted patriarchal values and the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" for women, reinforcing traditional gender roles. At the same time, Confucianism's integration with indigenous and Buddhist traditions led to a uniquely Vietnamese interpretation, where communal values and spiritual harmony were emphasized (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Pham et al., 2023).

Hồ Chí Minh's intellectual foundations

Overview of Hồ Chí Minh's early exposure to Confucian ideals. Born into a family deeply rooted in Confucian traditions, Hồ Chí Minh was exposed to its principles from an early age. His father, *Nguyễn Sinh Sắc*, was a Confucian scholar and nationalist who instilled in him the values of moral integrity, patriotism, and education (Nguyen, 2022). Hồ Chí Minh's early education included both formal lessons and self-directed studies, where he engaged with Confucian classics like *The Analects* and *Mencius*. These teachings laid a moral foundation that deeply influenced his personal values and political vision.

Living in Hue, a cultural and political center of Confucian scholarship during the *Nguyễn* dynasty (1802 – 1945), further immersed Hồ Chí Minh in Confucian traditions (Fernandez, 2011). Despite his later adoption of Marxism-Leninism, his intellectual foundations remained influenced by Confucian values, particularly the emphasis on self-cultivation (*tu thân*), moral governance, and education (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Pham Thi, 2022a).

The influence of Confucian ethics on his personal values and leadership philosophy. While Hồ Chí Minh rejected the feudalistic and patriarchal aspects of Confucianism, he embraced its positive elements. The concept of *nhân* (benevolence) and *ngĩa* (righteousness) resonated with his belief in ethical leadership and social justice. Hồ Chí Minh's philosophy of "serving the people" as the root of governance reflects the Confucian ideal of "the people as the foundation of the nation" (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Nguyen, Pham, et al., 2023). His leadership style emphasized humility, integrity, and dedication to collective welfare, blending Confucian ethics with revolutionary pragmatism.

Previous studies on Hồ Chí Minh's ideology

The interplay between Confucianism and Hồ Chí Minh's thought. Scholars have extensively analyzed how Hồ Chí Minh integrated Confucian ideals into his revolutionary ideology (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Nguyen, Nguyen et al., 2023). He adopted Confucian principles such as moral self-cultivation and societal harmony, aligning them with Marxist-Leninist tenets. For instance, Hồ Chí Minh's emphasis on moral rectitude among revolutionary cadres reflects the Confucian ideal of ethical leadership. His ability to reinterpret Confucian concepts, such as redefining *trung* (loyalty) and *hiếu* (filial piety) as loyalty to the nation and service to the people, demonstrates his pragmatic approach (Nguyen, Pham, et al., 2023; Pham et al., 2023).

Integration with Marxism-Leninism. Hồ Chí Minh's ideology represents a unique synthesis of Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism. He utilized Marxist principles to address socio-economic inequities while grounding his approach in Confucian ethics. This fusion created a revolutionary framework that emphasized collective welfare, moral responsibility, and cultural continuity. Scholars argue that this synthesis was instrumental in mobilizing support for Vietnam's independence and socialist reconstruction, showcasing the adaptability of traditional values in modern revolutionary contexts.

Through this integration, Hồ Chí Minh demonstrated his ability to harmonize traditional and modern ideologies, creating a cohesive philosophical paradigm that addressed Vietnam's socio-historical realities. His approach highlights the enduring relevance of Confucian ethics in shaping leadership and governance while adapting to the demands of contemporary society.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, focusing on primary and secondary sources to examine the integration of Confucian principles in Hồ Chí Minh's philosophy. The primary sources analyzed include Hồ Chí Minh's extensive writings, speeches, and testamentary documents. These texts offer direct insight into his ideological adaptations and interpretations of Confucian thought. Secondary sources, including historical and philosophical analyses of Confucianism and its evolution in Vietnam, provide context and critical perspectives.

The research investigates Confucian concepts within Hồ Chí Minh's thought, particularly notions like self-cultivation and "people as the root". By contextualizing these ideas within the framework of Hồ Chí Minh's revolutionary activities, the study illustrates the transformation of traditional ethics into practical governance and leadership strategies.

Data sources

The primary data for this study includes Hồ Chí Minh's works, such as *The Revolutionary Path* (*Đường Kách Mệnh*), *Testament* (*Di chúc*), and other writings archived in *The Complete Works of Hồ Chí Minh*. Confucian texts, such as *The Analects* and the works of Mencius, are referenced to trace the origins of key philosophical concepts.

Secondary literature includes scholarly analyses of Vietnamese history, the role of Confucianism in shaping governance and culture, and existing studies on Hồ Chí Minh's ideological synthesis. Sources like Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) and Pham et al. (2023) provide a comparative lens for examining the interplay between Confucianism, Marxism-Leninism, and Hồ Chí Minh's thought.

Analytical framework

The analytical framework is grounded in textual analysis, focusing on how Confucian principles are reinterpreted in Hồ Chí Minh's works. Key Confucian concepts, such as *tu thân* (self-cultivation), *chính danh* (rectification of names), and *dĩ dân vi bản* (people as the root), are identified and analyzed in the context of Hồ Chí Minh's revolutionary leadership.

The framework also considers the dialectical synthesis of Confucian ethics with Marxist-Leninist principles. For example, the study examines how Hồ Chí Minh redefined traditional virtues, such as *nhân* (benevolence) and *trung hiếu* (loyalty and filial piety), to align with revolutionary goals and the realities of Vietnam's socio-political landscape.

This methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of Hồ Chí Minh's philosophical adaptation of Confucian values, highlighting their practical application in governance and social transformation.

Limitations of the methodological approach

While this study provides valuable insights into the integration of Confucian principles in Hồ Chí Minh's philosophy, it acknowledges several limitations. First, the qualitative approach relies heavily on textual interpretation, which can introduce subjective biases in analyzing and contextualizing philosophical

concepts. Additionally, primary sources, such as Hồ Chí Minh's writings, may reflect a strategic narrative tailored to specific political contexts, limiting the ability to fully discern his authentic philosophical intent. Secondary sources, though valuable, often interpret Hồ Chí Minh's philosophy through varying theoretical lenses, which can lead to divergent conclusions. Furthermore, the study focuses primarily on written texts and may not fully account for the influence of oral traditions or less-documented aspects of Confucianism in Vietnam.

Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide a robust analysis by triangulating insights from diverse sources and maintaining a critical perspective on the data. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating a comparative analysis of other ideological influences or exploring alternative methodological approaches, such as ethnographic studies or oral histories, to complement the findings.

Results and Discussion

1. Influence on Hồ Chí Minh's Early Education

Hồ Chí Minh, a revolutionary leader and cultural figure, developed his ideology under the significant influence of Confucianism, particularly during his early education. Rooted in Confucian ethics, he absorbed values such as *tu thân* (self-cultivation), *nhân* (benevolence), and *dĩ dân vi bản* (people as the root), which later became integral to his leadership and governance philosophy. However, Hồ Chí Minh's innovation lay in adapting these principles to meet Vietnam's revolutionary needs while discarding outdated, feudalistic aspects.

Self-cultivation and ethical governance

The Confucian principle of *tu thân*, or self-cultivation, was central to Hồ Chí Minh's worldview. Traditionally, Confucianism taught that moral self-cultivation was the foundation for societal harmony, achieved through *tề gia, trị quốc, bình thiên hạ* (managing the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world). Hồ Chí Minh internalized this idea but expanded it to suit revolutionary ethics. He emphasized that revolutionary morality is cultivated through constant practice and perseverance, stating, "Revolutionary morality does not fall from the sky; it develops through persistent daily struggle and training... jade becomes brighter through polishing, and gold purer through refinement" (Ho, 2011a, p. 612).

By promoting self-discipline and moral fortitude among leaders, Hồ Chí Minh adapted *tu thân* as a transformative tool for revolutionary governance. Unlike traditional Confucianism, which placed moral development within a rigid hierarchical context, Hồ Chí Minh democratized the concept, advocating for leadership that reflected collective morality and integrity.

Ethical governance, another critical Confucian value, also shaped Hồ Chí Minh's leadership philosophy. Confucius emphasized that rulers must govern with virtue, asserting that moral leadership naturally inspires trust and loyalty among the people. Hồ Chí Minh echoed this belief, stating, "You must first be upright yourself to help others be upright" (Ho, 2011b, p. 130).

While retaining this moral foundation, Hồ Chí Minh rejected Confucianism's feudal hierarchies, advocating instead for collective leadership and democratic governance as tools to empower the masses.

The value of the people in governance

The Confucian principle of "people as the root" (*dĩ dân vi bản*) profoundly influenced Hồ Chí Minh's political thought. In Confucianism, the welfare of the people was seen as the cornerstone of a stable state, but it relied heavily on the moral integrity of rulers. Hồ Chí Minh redefined this principle, elevating the people to active agents of governance and revolution. He famously declared, "The people are the roots of the nation. Strong roots make the tree durable, and victory's tower is built on the foundation of the people" (Ho, 2011c, p. 325).

By centering governance on the people's needs and aspirations, Hồ Chí Minh laid the foundation for Vietnam's Democratic Republic. His assertion that "if the people are hungry, the Party and Government are at fault" underscores his commitment to prioritizing the well-being of citizens (Ho, 2011d, p. 518). This

reinterpretation transformed the passive, subject-focused role of the people in Confucian governance into an active, participatory model suited for revolutionary change.

Education and morality

Hồ Chí Minh's emphasis on education and moral development reflects a deep Confucian influence, reinterpreted through revolutionary goals. Confucius, revered as the "Model Teacher for All Generations," viewed moral education as foundational to societal harmony. Similarly, Hồ Chí Minh promoted a comprehensive educational philosophy that prioritized morality (*đức*), intellect (*trí*), physical health (*thể*), and aesthetics (*mỹ*). He criticized the narrow focus on academic achievements in Vietnamese schools, advocating for expanded ethical education (Ho Chi Minh Institute, 1996).

Moreover, Hồ Chí Minh valued lifelong learning, aligning with Confucian teachings that "among three people walking, there is always someone I can learn from" (Ho, 2011a, p. 528). Despite limited access to formal education, Hồ Chí Minh embodied this principle through self-directed learning, demonstrating that knowledge and morality must develop continuously. His educational reforms, including literacy campaigns and democratized access to education, reflect his synthesis of Confucian values with the revolutionary imperative of empowering the masses.

Leadership and moral exemplars

Confucianism's ideal of the *quân tử* (gentleman) provided a model for Hồ Chí Minh's vision of revolutionary leadership. The *quân tử* embodied virtues such as *nhân* (benevolence), *nghĩa* (righteousness), *trí* (wisdom), *tín* (trustworthiness), and *liêm* (integrity). Hồ Chí Minh redefined and expanded these traits to include *dũng* (courage), reflecting the needs of revolutionary leadership. He stated, "A revolutionary must have revolutionary morality as a foundation to accomplish the glorious mission of the revolution" (Ho, 2011a, p. 601).

Hồ Chí Minh's leadership philosophy also emphasized humility and service. Drawing on Mencius' principle that "the people are more important than the state, and the state is more important than the king" (Ho, 2011e, p. 455), he prioritized servant leadership that placed the welfare of the people above all else.

The findings presented here are closely tied to the study's methodology, which relied on a qualitative analysis of Hồ Chí Minh's writings and relevant Confucian texts. By identifying and contextualizing key principles—*tu thân*, *dĩ dân vi bản*, and *nhân*—the study illustrates how Hồ Chí Minh adapted Confucian values to align with revolutionary goals. Primary sources such as *The Revolutionary Path* and *Testament* provide direct evidence of his ideological reinterpretation, while secondary sources offer critical perspectives on Confucianism's historical evolution and cultural influence in Vietnam.

Hồ Chí Minh's early Confucian education deeply influenced his values and worldview, particularly in the areas of self-cultivation, ethical governance, education, and leadership. By creatively reinterpreting Confucian principles through the lens of revolutionary Marxist-Leninist ideology, he developed a unique philosophical framework that balanced cultural heritage with modern political realities. This synthesis not only resonated with Vietnam's historical values but also provided a dynamic foundation for its revolutionary and social transformation.

2. Adapting Confucian Values to The Revolution

Retaining progressive elements of Confucianism

Hồ Chí Minh's reinterpretation of Confucian values reflects a deliberate and pragmatic adaptation of traditional principles to suit the revolutionary needs of Vietnam. The study's textual analysis reveals that Hồ Chí Minh retained progressive Confucian ideals, such as *tu thân* (self-cultivation), *nhân* (benevolence), and *dĩ dân vi bản* (people as the root), as foundational elements of his leadership philosophy. These values, deeply rooted in Confucian thought, were redefined to serve a collective and revolutionary purpose.

For example, Hồ Chí Minh's emphasis on *nhân* moved beyond individual moral cultivation to reflect the solidarity of the masses. He reinterpreted *nhân* to highlight the primacy of the people, stating, "Benevolence and righteousness are the people. Under the sky, nothing is more precious than the people" (Ho, 2011f,

p. 453). This interpretation aligns with *dĩ dân vi bản*, a Confucian principle that governance must prioritize the welfare of the people. By linking Confucian moral tenets to his revolutionary objectives, Hồ Chí Minh established a clear ideological foundation that connected ethical leadership with the struggle for national liberation.

Furthermore, the study examines Hồ Chí Minh's focus on education as a transformative tool, rooted in Confucian ideals. Inspired by Confucius' advocacy for universal education, Hồ Chí Minh initiated large-scale literacy campaigns to empower the population. His belief in lifelong learning resonates with Confucian ideals of continuous self-improvement. He famously stated, "As long as I live, I must continue learning" (Ho, 2011c, p. 113). Through education, Hồ Chí Minh sought to eradicate ignorance and equip individuals with the knowledge necessary for nation-building and social progress, bridging traditional pedagogy with revolutionary objectives. This analysis highlights how Hồ Chí Minh adapted Confucian educational principles into practical strategies for societal transformation, addressing the urgent needs of post-colonial Vietnam.

Rejecting outdated patriarchal and hierarchical norms

Hồ Chí Minh's revolutionary approach also involved a critical rejection of Confucianism's outdated patriarchal and hierarchical elements. This study identifies key areas where Hồ Chí Minh diverged from traditional Confucian doctrines, particularly the "Three Bonds" (ruler-subject, father-son, husband-wife) and the "Three Obediences" for women. These doctrines reinforced rigid hierarchies and gender inequality, which Hồ Chí Minh considered incompatible with the principles of liberation and equality central to the revolution.

He declared, "Women make up half of humanity. If women are not liberated, society is not liberated" (Ho, 2011e, p. 512). His advocacy for women's emancipation and inclusion in leadership reflects a profound break from Confucian patriarchal norms. Hồ Chí Minh's will urged the government to promote and support women's roles in all aspects of society (Ho, 2011c). By addressing gender inequality, he reinterpreted societal roles to align with the socialist vision of equality and collective participation.

Additionally, Hồ Chí Minh rejected the traditional Confucian disdain for manual labor and the division between intellectual and physical workers. He emphasized the dignity of labor, asserting, "In our society, no profession is inferior; only laziness and dependence are shameful" (Ho, 2011g, p. 69). This egalitarian perspective aligns with Marxist-Leninist principles, promoting the value of collective contributions to national development and dismantling hierarchical class divisions.

Reinterpreting Confucian concepts for revolutionary ideals

The study's analytical framework further explores how Hồ Chí Minh redefined key Confucian virtues, such as *trung* (loyalty) and *hiếu* (filial piety), within the revolutionary context. Traditionally, *trung* signified loyalty to the monarch, and *hiếu* emphasized filial piety within the family. Hồ Chí Minh broadened these concepts to align with collective responsibility and national priorities, explaining, "In the past, morality meant loyalty to the king and filial piety to one's parents. Today, morality means loyalty to the nation and filial piety to the people" (Ho, 2011h, p. 170).

This reinterpretation reflects a strategic adaptation of Confucian values to inspire patriotic duty and social responsibility. Hồ Chí Minh emphasized that loyalty to the nation and service to the people were the highest moral duties in the revolutionary struggle, transforming traditional ethics into tools for mobilizing collective action.

Further analysis reveals how Hồ Chí Minh applied Confucian virtues like *cần* (diligence), *kiệm* (thrift), and *liêm* (integrity) to the demands of modern governance. He described diligence as intelligent and efficient effort for productivity and thrift as the responsible use of resources for communal benefit (Ho, 2011b, 2011i). These adaptations preserved the essence of Confucian ethics while aligning them with socialist values of resourcefulness, hard work, and collective welfare.

This study demonstrates that Hồ Chí Minh's engagement with Confucianism was guided by a dialectical approach, combining traditional values with Marxist-Leninist principles and Western thought. As highlighted in the methodology, the research contextualizes Hồ Chí Minh's reinterpretations within his

writings and revolutionary activities. His statement, “Society now develops every day. Thoughts and actions must also evolve. Holding onto old ideas without change will lead nowhere” (Ho, 2011j, p. 55), exemplifies his pragmatic approach to ideological synthesis.

Hồ Chí Minh viewed Confucianism as a cultural heritage to be critically examined and selectively applied. By integrating Confucian moral values with revolutionary ideals, he created a cohesive ideological framework that emphasized ethical governance, collective solidarity, and social justice. This dynamic synthesis allowed him to harmonize tradition and modernity, preserving the cultural foundations of Vietnamese society while advancing progressive, revolutionary goals.

By creatively adapting Confucian principles to fit Vietnam’s revolutionary needs, Hồ Chí Minh demonstrated the transformative potential of cultural synthesis. His ability to reinterpret traditional values while rejecting outdated norms highlights his visionary leadership in bridging Vietnam’s cultural heritage with modern governance and social reform.

3. Synthesis of Confucianism with Marxism-Leninism

Hồ Chí Minh’s revolutionary philosophy represents a remarkable synthesis of Confucian principles with Marxist-Leninist ideology, tailored to Vietnam’s socio-political context. This synthesis was not merely theoretical but manifested as a pragmatic framework guiding Vietnam’s revolutionary path and social transformation. Hồ Chí Minh’s approach demonstrated a profound understanding of both traditions, blending Confucian ethics with the scientific materialism and revolutionary methodology of Marxism-Leninism.

Integration with Marxism-Leninism

While Confucianism provided a moral and cultural framework, Marxism-Leninism offered Hồ Chí Minh the scientific methodology and ideological tools necessary for Vietnam’s liberation. Marxist-Leninist principles of class struggle, dialectical materialism, and proletarian leadership were integrated into Hồ Chí Minh’s vision, creating a cohesive philosophy that resonated with Vietnam’s historical and cultural realities.

The fusion of these traditions is evident in Hồ Chí Minh’s reinterpretation of “people as the root”. While Confucianism emphasized the people as the foundation of governance to ensure societal stability, Hồ Chí Minh extended this concept within a Marxist framework to advocate for the people as the true masters of the state. This was enshrined in the constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, ensuring that governance and policies prioritized the welfare and empowerment of the masses (Ho, 2011f).

Similarly, Hồ Chí Minh adapted the Confucian concept of loyalty (*trung*), traditionally directed toward monarchs, to signify loyalty to the nation and the revolutionary cause (Ho, 2011h). This shift from feudal allegiance to collective responsibility underscores his innovative integration of Confucian virtues with Marxist principles of equality and collective struggle.

Practical applications in policies and writings

Hồ Chí Minh’s writings and policies illustrate the practical application of this synthesis. His revolutionary ethics demanded that leaders demonstrate moral rectitude and serve as role models for the people. This is evident in his emphasis on the virtues of diligence (*cần*), thrift (*kiệm*), and integrity (*liêm*) for both cadres and citizens. These virtues, drawn from Confucian ethics, were expanded to include Marxist values such as collective solidarity and self-sacrifice for the greater good (Ho, 2011f).

Hồ Chí Minh’s leadership during the land reform campaigns and his directives to combat corruption reflect his commitment to ethical governance grounded in both Confucian morality and Marxist egalitarianism. For instance, his insistence that “cadres must lead by example” aligns with Confucian notions of moral leadership while serving the Marxist goal of building a just and equitable society (Ho, 2011b, pp. 126-127).

Harmonizing cultural heritage with revolutionary ideals

Hồ Chí Minh's ability to harmonize Confucian and Marxist principles highlights his respect for cultural heritage and his pragmatic approach to revolutionary transformation. By retaining the ethical core of Confucianism and enriching it with the scientific rigor of Marxism-Leninism, he created a philosophy that resonated deeply with the Vietnamese people.

Hồ Chí Minh's synthesis demonstrates that revolutionary ideologies need not reject traditional values. Instead, by critically engaging with cultural legacies, these values can be transformed into powerful tools for social and political progress. This dynamic integration of Confucian ethics and Marxist-Leninist ideals continues to serve as a model for applying revolutionary principles in culturally specific contexts.

4. Implications for Governance and Leadership

Cultural synthesis as a governance framework

Hồ Chí Minh's synthesis of Confucianism with Marxist-Leninist ideology provides a compelling model for governance that blends traditional cultural values with revolutionary principles. By harmonizing Confucian ethics, such as *tu thân* (self-cultivation) and *nhân* (benevolence), with Marxist ideals of equality and collective welfare, Hồ Chí Minh demonstrated how cultural traditions can be adapted to address contemporary challenges. His ability to retain the moral essence of Confucianism while rejecting feudalistic and patriarchal elements, such as rigid hierarchies and gender inequality, highlights a pragmatic approach to leadership that values both heritage and innovation (Ho, 2011f).

This cultural synthesis offers significant lessons for modern governance, particularly in societies navigating the balance between tradition and globalization. Leaders can draw from Hồ Chí Minh's example to build inclusive frameworks that respect cultural heritage while addressing contemporary socio-political realities.

The role of people-centric leadership

A core tenet of Hồ Chí Minh's philosophy is the Confucian idea of *dĩ dân vi bản* (people as the root), reinterpreted through a Marxist-Leninist lens to emphasize the empowerment of the masses. Hồ Chí Minh's assertion that "the people are the most precious" resonates with Mencius's emphasis on the populace's centrality but extends the concept by advocating for active participation in governance (Ho, 2011f, p. 453). His view that "strong roots make the tree durable" underlines the importance of fostering citizen agency and community empowerment (Ho, 2011c, p. 325). This people-centric governance model provides a counterpoint to centralized systems that prioritize state control over individual participation. Modern leaders can apply this philosophy to develop policies that prioritize citizen well-being, encourage democratic participation, and build societal resilience.

Moral integrity and ethical leadership

Hồ Chí Minh's leadership philosophy places significant emphasis on morality, echoing Confucian ideals of *liêm* (integrity), *trí* (wisdom), and *nhân* (benevolence). By redefining these values within a revolutionary context, Hồ Chí Minh crafted a moral framework that prioritizes accountability, humility, and public service (Ho, 2011k). This ethical leadership approach is particularly relevant for addressing modern challenges, such as corruption and political distrust.

For instance, Hồ Chí Minh's insistence on moral governance aligns with his belief that leadership must embody ethical conduct to inspire collective trust and unity. This focus on integrity remains a valuable lesson for leaders seeking to foster transparent and responsible governance.

The transformative power of education

Hồ Chí Minh's vision of governance highlights the transformative role of education in cultivating a socially conscious and ethical citizenry. Drawing from Confucian ideals that emphasize moral education, he prioritized eradicating illiteracy and promoting universal learning. Education, in Hồ Chí Minh's view, was both a means of individual empowerment and a tool for national advancement.

His campaigns to mobilize the masses through education align with Confucius's assertion that "education without class distinctions" (Ho, 2011a, p. 602). By democratizing access to knowledge, Hồ Chí Minh emphasized the role of education in fostering equality, critical thinking, and social responsibility—qualities essential for societal progress and sustainable governance. This approach highlights the need for modern leaders to invest in education systems that promote not only technical skills but also ethical awareness and civic responsibility.

Global implications for cross-cultural governance

Hồ Chí Minh's ability to integrate Eastern Confucian values with Western revolutionary ideologies demonstrates the potential of cross-cultural synthesis in governance. His reinterpretation of *nhân nghĩa* (benevolence and righteousness) as "loyalty to the people and devotion to the nation" illustrates how traditional concepts can be adapted to inspire collective action and social harmony (Ho, 2011h, p. 170).

In an era marked by increasing cultural pluralism and ideological diversity, Hồ Chí Minh's synthesis offers a valuable framework for fostering inclusive governance. Leaders facing cultural and political polarization can draw on his philosophy to build systems that harmonize ethical traditions with practical solutions for societal challenges.

The findings presented above are grounded in a rigorous qualitative analysis of Hồ Chí Minh's writings, speeches, and related Confucian texts. The methodological approach, as outlined in this study, focused on identifying key Confucian concepts such as *tu thân*, *dĩ dân vi bản*, and *liêm* and analyzing their reinterpretation within Hồ Chí Minh's revolutionary context. By triangulating insights from primary and secondary sources, the study illustrates how Hồ Chí Minh's leadership philosophy reflects a deliberate synthesis of traditional ethics and modern ideologies (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Pham et al., 2023).

This connection between results and methodology ensures that the study's conclusions are firmly rooted in textual evidence and critical analysis, providing a comprehensive understanding of Hồ Chí Minh's governance philosophy.

While the study offers valuable insights, it acknowledges certain limitations. The reliance on textual analysis introduces potential subjectivity in interpreting Hồ Chí Minh's philosophical intent. Additionally, the primary sources, such as Hồ Chí Minh's writings, may reflect strategic narratives shaped by specific political contexts, limiting a full understanding of his authentic ideological motivations.

Secondary sources, though insightful, often present varying interpretations, leading to divergent conclusions. Moreover, this study primarily focuses on written texts, which may overlook oral traditions or less-documented influences of Confucianism in Vietnam. Future research could address these limitations through interdisciplinary approaches, such as ethnographic studies or oral histories, to provide a more holistic perspective.

Hồ Chí Minh's synthesis of Confucian principles and Marxist-Leninist ideology offers profound implications for governance, leadership, and society. His emphasis on people-centric leadership, ethical governance, and the transformative power of education demonstrates the enduring relevance of traditional values in addressing contemporary challenges.

By creatively adapting Confucian ethics to align with revolutionary goals, Hồ Chí Minh crafted a legacy that transcends time and geography. His philosophy provides a valuable blueprint for modern leaders seeking to harmonize cultural heritage with innovation, foster inclusive governance, and build resilient societies in an interconnected world.

In short, Hồ Chí Minh's approach underscores the transformative potential of cultural synthesis in achieving progress, unity, and social justice, offering enduring lessons for governance in the 21st century.

Conclusions

This study highlights the profound influence of Confucianism on Hồ Chí Minh's thought and its pivotal role in shaping his leadership philosophy. From his early exposure to Confucian ethics, Hồ Chí Minh internalized key principles such as *tu thân* (self-cultivation), *nhân* (benevolence), and *dĩ dân vi bản* (people

as the root), which became the moral foundation for his vision of governance and societal harmony. However, he pragmatically adapted these principles to align with Vietnam's revolutionary goals, rejecting feudalistic and patriarchal elements, such as rigid hierarchies and gender inequality, while retaining their progressive aspects.

Hồ Chí Minh's synthesis of Confucian ethics with Marxist-Leninist ideology created a cohesive framework that harmonized traditional Vietnamese values with modern revolutionary ideals. By combining the moral focus of Confucianism with the scientific rigor of Marxist principles, he emphasized ethical governance, education, and people-centric policies. This pragmatic integration not only served as a blueprint for Vietnam's social and political transformation but also showcased the adaptability of cultural traditions in addressing contemporary challenges.

The significance of Hồ Chí Minh's philosophy extends beyond Vietnam, offering valuable insights for modern governance and leadership. His approach underscores the enduring relevance of cultural heritage in addressing contemporary issues, highlighting the importance of moral integrity, collective welfare, and ideological flexibility.

Future research can build on this study by exploring comparative analyses of Hồ Chí Minh's philosophical synthesis with other leaders who integrated traditional values with modern ideologies. Additionally, studies could examine the practical application and long-term impact of Hồ Chí Minh's philosophy on contemporary Vietnamese policies and governance. A broader investigation into the role of Confucianism in other socialist or post-colonial contexts would further illuminate how cultural traditions can adapt to modern political frameworks. Lastly, interdisciplinary approaches, including oral histories and ethnographic studies, could provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of Confucian and Marxist values in Vietnamese society.

In conclusion, Hồ Chí Minh's ability to harmonize Confucianism and Marxist-Leninism reflects a profound understanding of cultural adaptation and ideological synthesis. His legacy offers a timeless model for ethical leadership and the interplay between tradition and modernity, inspiring ongoing discussions on progress, unity, and social justice.

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