

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Is the *Three Character Classic* (《三字经》) still suitable for contemporary literacy and enlightenment education for children? Insights from the perspective of cognitive psychology and child development psychology

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Abstract: The *Three Character Classic* (《三字经》), also translated as *San Zi Jing* or *The Triword Primer*, is the traditional Chinese Primer with the most significant influence and the broadest appeal. In the 21st century Chinese traditional cultural revival, traditional texts such as the *Three Character Classic* are reused as child education primer. Is the *Three Character Classic* still suitable for contemporary children's literacy and enlightenment? From the perspective of cognitive psychology and child development psychology, this paper used the method of critical literature review and content analysis to investigate the relationship between the *Three Character Classic* and children's language development, attention, memory, cognition, and moral development. It found that the content, structure, teaching approach of it conform to children's physical and cognitive development during early childhood. The *Three Character Classic* is not only the primary text for children's Chinese learning but also a valuable tool to understand the spiritual core of traditional Chinese culture. It has a particular value for children's literacy and enlightenment and those who learn Chinese as a second language.

Keywords: *Three Character Classic*, Chinese Primer, literacy and enlightenment education, cognitive psychology, child development psychology

1 Introduction

With the increasing progress in globalisation, Chinese culture has been receiving concern from around the world increasingly. Learning Chinese as a second or foreign language is becoming a new normal in many countries. Therefore, parents and educators are exploring what materials are more suitable for children's Chinese literacy and enlightenment education. On the one hand, new language resources have been developed continuously. On the other hand, traditional Chinese classics have been re-emphasised. The *Three Character Classic* was one of the most representative and influential teaching materials for children in ancient China, which has been circulating for more than 700 years. As the first Primer for most children's education in pre-modern China, the *Three Character Classic* lays the foundations for later study of Confucian classics such as the Lesser Learning (The Lesser Learning (《小学》) is an introductory book compiled by Zhu Xi for Confucian scholars. It covers personal manners, social morality, and the predecessors' good words and deeds), the Four Books (The Four Books (《四书》) are *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Analects of Confucius*, and *Mencius*), and other classics. With the re-recognition of the value of traditional Chinese culture, as a rudimentary textbook for children, the *Three Character Classic* has entered the

vision of educators again. It is not only highly praised by Chinese officials and was written into the national policy of children's education, but also has been widely used in ethnic Chinese circles, and has been becoming an essential primer for children to learn Chinese, and being well received in those who are learning Chinese as a second language.

Existing studies on the *Three Character Classic* in China for the purpose of international communication mainly focused on the overall introduction, translation and dissemination, and modern value. Some researchers [1–3] investigated it as a classic of traditional Chinese culture from the perspective of translation to explore the translation skills of Chinese classics, and some others [4, 5] respectively studied the modern value of family education, ideological and moral education. Besides, some master's theses analysed the linguistic features and historical status of it. In addition to the studies of translation of *Three Character Classic* in different languages, other studies in English are as follows. Liu (1985) discussed linguistic features, uses, preservation, and translations of the *Three Character Classic*. Zhu and Hu (2011) [6] studied its content and the debate about its revival in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China. Hong et al. (2013) [7] experimented with the Solitary and Heart Attack games of the *Three Character Classic*. Such studies confirm the international influence of the *Three Character Classic*, the merits of it in language and organisation, and its essential role in child education. But relevant studies published in English-language journals not only are quite few and far from enough in general, but also lack detailed studies specially focus on the *Three Character Classic* and the development of children.

As an instructional material for children's Chinese literacy and enlightenment, does the ancient *Three Character Classic* still meet the needs of the current era? Does it conform to children's physical and cognitive development? Although the *Three Character Classic* has gained much attention in the academic field, few studies have specifically analysed its modern value and applicability from the perspective of cognitive psychology and child development psychology. This study aimed to re-examine the content, structure, and pedagogy of the *Three Character Classic* from the perspectives of cognitive psychology and child development psychology, which is helpful to further discover and explore the educational value of the *Three Character Classic* and means to bridge the gap in previous studies and lay a foundation for the future research. It can also increase its epochal character and shed light on Chinese children's literacy and enlightenment and those who are learning Chinese as a second language in other countries.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Overview of the *Three Character Classic*

Scholars have revised and annotated the *Three Character Classic* (The authorship is controversial in academic circles, but it is generally believed that Wang Yinglin (1223-1296) wrote it, although some scholars prefer Ou Shizi (1234-1324)) many times across the dynasties, which has created different versions of it. This study used the version titled *Annotation of the Three Character Classic* (《三字经训诂》) by Wang Xiang in 1666. This version was annotated correctly, and it was prevalent and enjoyed widespread use. Its full text is just 1,068 words, but it is rich in knowledge and strong in practicality. It can be categorised into six parts: (1) the importance of teaching and learning, (2) morals, (3) basic knowledge of common things, (4) the order of learning content, (5) historical facts, and (6) exemplary people.

Similar to the works of other ancient and pre-modern Chinese educators, the *Three Character Classic* begins with a discussion on human nature and an explanation of the importance

of teaching and learning. This part comprises 84 words. Following Mencius' theory on the original goodness of human nature, the *Three Character Classic* states, "First, mankind has a kind heart" (人之初, 性本善), which identifies human nature as "kind." Then, it explains that, although they have similarities, nurture and education are different, which affirms the important role of education in human development and that children should diligently study.

The second part is 36 words that mainly list the morals that children should embrace. It points out that children should adhere to the words of great teachers and their trusted friends, and they should learn the rules of etiquette at a young age. Then, it encourages children to develop a sense of filial piety and a love for their elders through the stories of Huang Xiang and Kong Rong.

The third part introduces basic knowledge of common things in 198 words. It sets forth the learning structure: morals followed by knowledge acquisition. Next, the concepts of "one," "ten," "hundred" and "thousand" are presented, followed by explanations of common things of daily life: Three Lights (The Three Lights (三才) are the sky, earth, and man in *The Book of Change*), Three Brights (The Three Brights (三光) are the sun, moon, and stars), Three Guides (The Three Guides (三纲) are the king guides the court, the father guides the son, and the man guides his wife), Four Seasons, Four Directions (The Four Directions (四方) are North, South, East, and West), Five Elements (The Five Elements (五行) are metal, wood, water, fire, and earth), and so on.

The fourth part is in 204 words on Confucian classics, such as the *Lesser Learning*, the Four Books, the *Filial Canon* (The Filial Canon (《孝经》) is a book about filial duty, supposedly written by Confucius and his followers), the Six Classics (The Six Classics (六经) are *Book of Poetry*, *Book of History*, *Book of Rites*, *Book of Change*, *Spring Annals*, *Autumn Annals*, and *Book of Music* (which has been lost)), and the works of all classes of philosophers. It introduces the authors, main contents, language styles, learning methods, and other related information about the Four Books and Six Classics.

The fifth part is 276 words on Chinese history, and the supplements to the *Three Character Classic* from later periods are mainly in this part. Starting with *Fu Xi*, *Shen Nong*, and the *Yellow Emperor* myths, it describes the differences across the dynasties, their founders, the lengths of reign, and other information in chronological order. It explains the correct attitude to take towards history, historical materials, and the methods used to learn history.

The sixth part uses examples of diligent people to encourage children to study diligently. In 270 words, it introduces several historical figures who diligently worked to finally achieve great things. Moreover, it uses dogs, cocks, silkworms, and bees as examples to encourage children to be responsible and diligently study. Overall, it directs children not to indulge in lives of pleasure and comfort, but to focus on the study to aim for official rank and fame.

2.2 The use of the *Three Character Classic* in pre-modern China

The *Three Character Classic* was not widely known or disseminated until the middle to late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). After scholarly revisions and promotions by booksellers, it became very popular in the traditional Chinese enlightenment school (The traditional enlightenment school (蒙学) was a primary school in ancient China. Children began attending at ages seven or eight, but there was no standard age) and became the first Primer after the Emperor *Daoguang* (1821-1850) of the Qing Dynasty to teach aristocratic and royal children as well as ordinary children. During the Qing Dynasty, the *Three Character Classic* was widely used in the Qing Dynasty and was translated into minor languages such as Mongolian, Manchu, etc. Therefore, the *Three Character Classic* played an important role in Mongolian and Manchu children's Chinese language and Han nationality culture learning, which promoted their educational

development and cultural integration. Even in the Republic of China, when new schools were successively established, and new teaching materials and courses were adopted, it was still widely used as literacy teaching material in rural and old schools.

2.3 The use of *Three Character Classic* in today's China

At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, with the revival of traditional Chinese culture and the re-recognition of ancient classics, the *Three Character Classic* gained official recognition and occupied an important position in traditional Chinese culture teaching again in the lower grades of primary schools.

In *The Guidelines for the Improvement of Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture Education* issued by the Ministry of Education in 2014, it points out that it is necessary to “gradually advance the excellent traditional Chinese culture education in each stage” and to “integrate the Chinese excellent traditional culture education into the curriculum and teaching materials system” [8]. Under the national call, public schools have carried out traditional cultural education courses. Many of the textbooks used in kindergartens and lower grades of primary schools include the *Three Character Classic*. For example, the *National Primary and Secondary School Experimental Textbook of the Chinese Traditional Culture Education* series which aims to teach pupils traditional Chinese knowledge and behaviour listed the *Three Character Classic* in one of the 17 volumes [9]. Besides, the *Three Character Classic* is considered to be “a primer to persuade people, especially children” in *Classic Primary School Textbook – Chinese Traditional Culture* [10].

2.4 The global spread of the *Three Character Classic*

From a global perspective, the *Three Character Classic* was first translated into Latin by an Italian missionary, Michele Ruggieri, in the 16th century; it was later translated into Japanese, Russian, English, and other languages. It gained global attention particularly after its 19th-century English translations by Robert Morrison (1782-1834), Elijah Coleman Bridgman (1801-1861), Herbert Giles (1845-1935) and other missionaries. Moreover, the UNESCO listed it as “Children’s Series on Moral Education” in 1990 [11], and it continues to influence early childhood education in China.

In recent years, the *Three Character Classic* has also been used in Chinese teaching in ethnic Chinese circles and non-native Chinese speakers. Phebe Xu Gray, an associate professor of Chinese at Lee University, Cleveland, Tennessee, also pointed out that *Three Character Classic* is a good vocabulary book which is suitable for Chinese language and cultural education [12] and expressed her recognition of the educational value of *Three Character Classic* in her book called *The Three Character Classic: A Bilingual Reader of China’s ABCs*.

3 Method

This study will mainly use the method of critical literature review and content analysis to analyse the content, structure, and pedagogy of the *Three Character Classic* from the perspective of cognitive psychology and child development psychology. This study tries to explore the compatibility between the *Three Character Classic* and modern children’s cognitive development and its value in contemporary society.

First, this paper introduced theoretical and practical background to the *Three Character Classic*. Next, it briefly reviewed the literature related to the use of the *Three Character Classic* in Pre-modern China, today’s China, and its global spread. Then it is followed by results and

discussion which focus on children's language development, attention, memory, cognition, and moral development in figures and analysis. Finally, it drawn two main conclusions related to the content of the *Three Character Classic* and its relationship to traditional Chinese culture, especially the Confucian culture and Confucianism.

4 Results and discussion

During their years of literacy education, children's bodies are steadily developing after experiencing rapid growth between birth and about two years of age. Their mental functions are continuously developing as the brain continues to increase in weight, and its structure becomes more and more complex. As frontal lobe volume increases, children's perceptive abilities (Perceptive abilities are the senses of sight, hearing, and kinaesthesia, and the perceptions of space and time), attention, memory, comprehension, imagination, and other cognitive abilities improve. It turns out that the *Three Character Classic* conforms to the children's cognitive development to a certain extent from the perspective of the five aspects of cognitive psychology and child development psychology.

4.1 Language development

Children develop basic language skills during early childhood, and they use their verbal vocabularies to express themselves accurately. However, the abilities to write and use formal language require special training and tend to develop much later than verbal abilities. As a primer for children, the *Three Character Classic* is prominently helpful in literacy and the grammar of Chinese characters.

The Chinese language is ideographic with individual characters as morphemes, and Chinese characters are rich in meaning. The approach to learning Chinese in the Primer is to start with the individual characters' pronunciations, written forms, and meanings. Learning sentences, passages, and even phrases must wait until a threshold amount of vocabulary has been mastered. This seems tied to a consideration of the frequency of character usage where there are 1,068 characters in the *Three Character Classic*, of which 512 characters are not repeated and almost are common words. The *Basic Vocabulary Table of Modern Chinese Characters* has 480 basic characters, which accounts for 94% of the *Three Character Classic*'s 1,068 total. Only 32 (6%) of the *Three Character Classic*'s characters are not in the Table, and most of those are names of persons, titles, dynasties, or implements. Thus, the *Three Character Classic* not only tied to character usage in pre-modern Chinese but also to modern Chinese.

As a literacy textbook, the *Three Character Classic* is usually combined with *Hundred Family Surnames* (《百家姓》) and the *Thousand Character Prose* (《千字文》), with which students could accumulate a vocabulary of about 1,500 characters after completing their study of the three books [13], which is similar to the 1,600-character vocabulary goal for first and second grades of modern Chinese primary education (The vocabulary goal is in the Chinese Curriculum Standards of Compulsory Education (2011 edition)). Thus, although there are differences between ancient and modern Chinese, the *Three Character Classic*'s value as a literacy primer is strong. Moreover, it is concordant with the principles of learning Chinese and children's linguistic development.

On the other hand, in terms of the characters' complexity, a few of them are difficult, but most of the characters in the *Three Character Classic* require 5-13 strokes; just 31 characters need more than 18 strokes [14]. Thus, the *Three Character Classic*'s vocabulary comprises mostly common and basic characters that are within reach of the targeted children's linguistic

developmental stage and supports their abilities to effectively read and write basic Chinese.

Regarding syntax, the sentence structures and rhetorical usages in the *Three Character Classic* are quite rich, such as parallel structure, which might help children grasp the basic aspects of Chinese language syntax. For example, “the poetry dwindled” (诗既亡) and “great Han arose” (汉业建) use the subject-verb (SV) structure; “silkworms make silk” (蚕吐丝) and “cocks report the dawn” (鸡司晨) use the subject-verb-object (SVO) structure; “adhere to teachers” (亲师友) and “gave off sparkles” (记善言) use the verb-object structure; and, “heaven, earth, and man” (天地人) and “chickens, dogs, and sows” (鸡犬豕) use parallel structure. The *Three Character Classic* uses several basic sentence structures of classical Chinese that not only improve children’s language skills and meet the basic requirements of learning Chinese grammar but also enrich the sentence structures to avoid boring repetition. Also, the *Three Character Classic* uses many rhetorical devices, such as metaphors, antithesis (For example, “Child father reveres. Wife man endears,” “What’s a father? A good teacher; What’s a teacher? A strict preacher.”), joining adjacent sentences head-to-tail (Joining head-to-tail of adjacent sentences (顶针) is a rhetorical device in Chinese, such as “Count one to ten; ten to one hundred.”), and parallelism, which might help children attain high literacy levels.

In sum, vocabulary and sentences of the *Three Character Classic* seem tied to a goal of striving for appropriately a difficulty level within the range of children’s linguistic development based upon the assumption that the approach will improve children’s written language skills and creates a solid foundation for their further reading and writing accomplishments.

4.2 Attention

Children’s curiosity about the world grows as their perceptual senses develop. They are exposed to many stimuli in their daily lives, although their mental development may not be mature enough to understand them all. Therefore, it is important selectively and systematically to introduce children to facts of life and education to help them to understand a variety of stimuli as well as to satisfy their curiosity. The *Three Character Classic* has been referred to as “a small encyclopaedia” that aims to provide children with a large amount of information in a short time, similar to the goal of the *Visible World in Pictures (Orbis Pictus)* by John Amos Comenius. This focus is particularly evident in the sections that introduce basic things and Chinese history.

In the introduction to basic things, the *Three Character Classic* explains many things about the lives of ancient Chinese scholars. It teaches facts about the sky, earth, man, and so on, and it also explains some principles of life, such as the endless cycle of the seasons and the mutual promotion and restraint among the five elements. These clarifying details help children to categorise things and to understand their relationships.

In the section on Chinese history, the *Three Character Classic* uses more words than in any other part. Begins with the August Three (三皇) (Fuxi, Shennong and the Yellow Emperor) in the myths, it relates China’s dynastic changes in chronological order, including the names of some of the important founders and emperors, the lengths of their reigns, capital cities, and other details. The description depicts a broad Chinese historical map for children. Besides, it aims to cultivate children’s historical awareness and teach them how to learn about history. It points out the many and varied reasons that dynasties are replaced, which helps children to have positive perspectives about historical change. It also stresses the methods of historical learning by pointing out the necessity of careful examination of records and the cultivation of critical thinking when reading history books. Learning history requires the ability to read aloud, critically consider facts, accumulate knowledge, and study with prolonged persistence.

Modern cognitive psychological research has found that stimuli at the appropriate level of difficulty best spark children’s interest and attention [15]. The *Three Character Classic* is

appropriately difficult for children, and its structure proceeds from easy to difficult. It gives children important information and the order, from first to last, in which the classics should carefully be read and studied, as follows: The *Lesser Learning*, the Four Books, the *Filial Canon*, the Six Classics and the philosophers' classics.

There are two intelligent reasons for this structure. First, the difficulty of these books progresses from literacy to morals and from morals to complex speculations. And considering the *Three Character Classic* as a whole, the content is arranged from the importance of teaching and learning to the knowledge children need to learn, which includes morals, basic knowledge of common things, classical books and historical knowledge, and, then, it encourages children to diligently study by using the examples of diligent people. The overall structure can be summarised as aiming to develop a learning orientation followed by obtaining knowledge and, then, understanding the goals and benefits of education, which conforms to the principles of children's attention development. Second, from the perspective of teaching intensity, the *Three Character Classic* follows the principle of "If children can read ten lines, the teacher only teaches them seven or eight lines". This is a principle focused on quality rather than the quantity of learning. When children begin to learn, their interest in and desire to seek knowledge are more important than the knowledge acquisition. The teaching approach is to teach within a child's capacity and not make it excessively difficult or burdensome for the child. This benefits them by encouraging their interest and enthusiasm for learning, which in turn retains their attention.

4.3 Memory

During early childhood, memory capacity increases with age, and the mnemonic strategies, such as rehearsal and organisation, are developing [16]. Children transition from non-rehearsal to automatic use of rehearsal, and they use the organisation with some guidance. The content and teaching of the *Three Character Classic* conform to children's memory development.

The words in the *Three Character Classic* are often repeated (512 non-repeated of a total 1,068 characters), and the average frequency of a word is about 2.09 times per character. In other words, each of the 1,068 characters is used an average of 2.09 times in each complete reading of the *Three Character Classic*. Many of the repeated words are polysemous words in meaning or pronunciation. It strengthens the memory and fights forgetfulness by reusing words to embed them in memory.

Regarding structure, the Chinese primers before the Song Dynasty were mainly written in four-character sets, only a few of them were written with three-character sets. It is difficult to use three-character sets with rhymes in an entire text, which might create content that is excessively difficult, farfetched, or boring. For children, even one word less might ease the reading, writing, and memory burdens [17]. The *Three Character Classic* incorporated the contents and forms of previous primers, and it takes a pause every three words, and every two-pause rhyme takes the same finals, which is a form similar to children's songs. Therefore, whether there are six or 12 words in a group in the *Three Character Classic*, the result is a catchy and symmetrical structure that is easy to remember.

On the other hand, although children's organisational strategies are developing, they cannot automatically use them. There are 18 classical books (经书), 17 history books (史书), and more than 100 historical characters in the *Three Character Classic* that are coherently organised. Its voluminous content was categorised by theme, each of which is part of a system based on its significance, such as the Four Books and the Six Classics, and the historical characters are matched to the themes. This is an effective way to help children use organisation by adding informational blocks to materials to assist developing and accessing semantic memory

development [15].

Some would argue that the goal should not be memorising but meaningful engagements, and indeed this would seem to be what is proposed with the 21st-century curriculum reform model. At the same time, it seems like a cultural tendency to focus more on memorisation and recitation in traditional Chinese early education. The *Three Character Classic* teaching method prioritises rote memory learning and uses meaningful memory as a supplement. First, the teacher leads the students to pause (The traditional Chinese classics are unpunctuated and teachers must teach beginning students to appropriately pause) and explains the meanings of the words and sentences in the text. Then, the students read aloud and memorise them. The idea is that repetition and recitation help to achieve memorisation, as the maxim states: “One will understand a book after reading it one hundred times”. On the one hand, children’s language communications are increasing during this developmental period, and they need to be able to speak well and express themselves, reading aloud might somewhat meet the need for clear verbal communication and might link children’s memories with their senses. Furthermore, because children’s capacities for short-term memory are limited, repetition and recitation might install new knowledge in their minds in fixed patterns that could easily transform into long-term memory. As they grow and their lives increasingly deepen from their experiences, children gradually understand and use their accumulated knowledge.

4.4 Cognition

Piaget’s theory of cognitive development proposes that children in this developmental stage are in the “concrete operational stage”. Their abstract and hypothetical thinking has not yet developed, and reasoning is accomplished by thinking in concrete terms, meaning that they need concrete events and objects to understand intangible concepts and principles. The *Three Character Classic* is rich in basic or common items of agrarian society, which are what children need to know today. It is easy to understand and closely relates to children’s daily life, which might help them to link what they learn to what they see. Last, the *Three Character Classic* uses categories, such as Six Domestic Animals, Eight Tones, and the Six Classics, to combine objects with numbers to help children understand abstract numbers and principles.

The *Three Character Classic* uses cases, analogies, metaphors, and so on to convey abstract meaning, which would seem to fit with the importance of background knowledge activation as deemed important by cognitive studies of reading. First, it uses many individual cases to facilitate understanding. Children tend to imitate what they are taught, and the cases are all positive to set good examples for them. For example, it stresses filial piety through the story of Huang Xiang (According to *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* (《二十四孝》), Huang Xiang was nine years old when he lost his mother. He used a fan to cool his father’s pillows in summer and used his own body to warm the bed in winter), and it clarifies the meaning of love between brothers through the story of Kong Rong (The four-year-old Kong Rong took the initiative to give the bigger pear to his brother and kept the smaller one). Besides, to help children understand the importance and necessity of diligence, it lists many examples of people, such as Confucius, who was knowledgeable, studious, and craved knowledge; Zhao Pu, a Song Dynasty politician and strategist who studied diligently; Liu Yan, who became an official at age seven; and Xie Daoyun and Cai Wenji, who were intelligent girls. It demonstrates that whether a person is already successful, talented, poor, young or old is not a reason to stop studying. Through this device, it tries to encourage children to begin studying when they are young and to be as diligent as possible.

Second, the *Three Character Classic* uses analogies that link people and things to encourage children to study. For example, it mentions that jade stone cannot become jade items without

carving, which means that carving is to jade as studying is to the truth. By pointing out that dogs guard at night, cocks report the dawn, silkworms make silk, and bees make honey, it aims to encourage children to dutifully study.

4.5 Moral development

Children's social interactions gradually increase throughout childhood, and their interpersonal relationships gradually deepen. As age and social lives enrich, children's moral and emotional intelligence develops, and they gain moral sensibility, rationality, and aesthetic emotions [18]. As a primer, the *Three Character Classic* attaches great importance to children's moral education.

Piaget contended that children develop morals in stages as a process from heteronomous morals to self-disciplined morals and as a transformation from objective responsibility to subjective responsibility. During early childhood, children could hardly have matured moral principles. The *Three Character Classic* values harmonious relationships and teaches children the rules of interpersonal relationships to help them develop the moral principles valued by society. It uses Huang Xiang as an example to teach children respect for their parents and the story of Kong Rong to encourage them to respect their elder brothers. Besides, the *Three Character Classic* encourages children to adhere to their teachers and good friends because they are young and need to learn correct etiquette, such as the Ten Points of Justice. It explains the social rules, such as love between father and son, mutual consideration between husband and wife, and the loyalty of subjects to their leaders.

In sum, the *Three Character Classic* guides children's behaviour in the family and in new relationships that arise as they age and accumulate experiences, such as relationships with teachers, classmates, friends, spouses, and leaders. It seems that children are being encouraged to contemplate relationships and respectfulness rather than the only correct etiquette.

5 Conclusion

This study confirms the merits of the *Three Character Classic* in language and organization, and its important role in child education, which is coherent with the previous study. What's more, it explored the relationship between the *Three Character Classic* and children's development from its content, structure, and pedagogy. Two main conclusions were drawn as follows:

First, although the six parts of the *Three Character Classic* have different themes, they all use rich content to teach children basic social rules and morals and encourage them to study diligently. It tends to focus on children's attention, support their memory and retention, and it helps them to aim high, set long-term goals, and diligently work towards success. It provides all children who study it with rich knowledge in a condensed form, quickly helping them to achieve literacy, and it establishes morality and effective study habits. According to the theory of the zone of proximal development, the content of the *Three Character Classic* is moderately difficult, which helps to improve children's potential development level and isn't outdated for contemporary literacy and enlightenment education for children.

Second, the *Three Character Classic* is one of the carriers of ancient Chinese Confucianism and traditional Chinese educational ideas. It offers a blueprint for the ideal life stressing preparation for the future at the end. It urges children to diligently study when they are young and be active as adults, and create a better society for future generations. As a part of the trend to rejuvenate China's ancient traditional culture, the *Three Character Classic* somewhat correlates with current social developments, children's cognitive growth, and closely relates to

the internalised Confucianism of modern China. Therefore, the *Three Character Classic* is the basic text to understand traditional Chinese culture, especially Confucianism, and an important tool to understand Chinese traditional educational ideas and practice, which is also required in today's society.

The findings of this study could help deepen the understanding of the relationship between the *Three Character Classic*, and Confucianism, and children's educational ideas in ancient China, and further promoted the adoption of the ancient classics as the carrier of traditional culture, and contribute to filling in the deficiencies of academic research. Further research can focus on the revision and re-creation of the *Three Character Classic*, as well as its global dissemination and use. Then it could be expanded to other ancient educational classics to explore how to inherit, revise, and use the traditional classics better in a new era. Besides, the further studies can also conduct a more in-depth study of the role of the *Three Character Classic* and children's cognition, language, and memory through quantitative, such as variable control experiments, or qualitative methods and provide new evidence for its modern appropriateness.

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