



Ideals and Goals

Ethics and Morals

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About this Project

In this project we chose to focus on the teaching of morals and ethics in the time period after the Second World War in the People's Republic of China, South Korea and Japan. We chose this particular time period due to fundamental societal changes that occurred in the three countries in the aftermath of World War Two.

We chose our framework from the "Journal of Moral Education" focusing on the impact of Confucian values and the psychological theory of Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development. In this poster we aim to answer the following research question

- Are moral and ethical values being conveyed in East Asian schools to young adults (starting with adolescence)?

State of the Art

There is little to no scientific work comparing PRC, South Korea and Japan with regards to modern Confucianism and moral and ethical education, but there is a tremendous amount of sources that deal with each country separately. This is why we chose this particular topic and tried to compare the developments of moral and ethical education in East Asian schools and how they might be interconnected.

Methodology

In this project we aim to connect Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of "Stages of Moral Development" focusing on the second level with the moral values that are taught in Confucianism, and try to elaborate if and how young adults are morally educated in East Asia. Our research is entirely based on secondary literature and articles in English and German, which focus on the subjects of Confucianism and moral education. Since none of the members of the project are fluent in Chinese, Japanese or Korean, our material is rather limited and we cannot discuss all factors influencing moral education (-such as fiction, for example).

Per definition, the term "young adults" means an age range from fifteen until the early twenties for boys and thirteen to

twenty for girls. According to Freud, young adults build a new "superego" (which consists of morals and values) by synthesizing the superego they have attained as a child with new moral views attained as young adults.

The reason why there is no moral education during the phase of adolescence in most countries is because it is deemed futile. During this particular period youngsters go through drastic physical and mental changes and struggle to become autonomous beings: their moral development is mostly influenced by friends and idols. Once a certain degree of self-esteem and self-awareness is achieved, it is important to start a moral education. According to Kohlberg this is the phase in a young person's life when they are bound to reach level two (or higher) and attain the morals set up in the respective society.

Ethics and Morals

"The subject of ethics essentially comprises issues fundamental to practical decision-making, and so the discipline, through long considered a branch of philosophy, is closely linked with many other fields of inquiry, including anthropology, economics, politics, and sociology. Ethics, nonetheless, remains distinct from such areas of study in that it is occupied not so much with factual knowledge as it is with values – namely, human conduct as it ought to be rather than as it actually is." (Safra, 2007¹⁵:578)

Morals are subjective views of what is right and wrong. They are normally conveyed through different means such as philosophy, religion and fiction.

Confucianism

It is thanks to Confucius (551-479 BCE) that the old classical Chinese texts were not entirely lost, but recollected, restructured and edited. Confucius thus revived the old classics that originated in China and formed the ethical philosophy of Confucianism, which is sometimes also described as a religion.

"The chief aim of Confucian Learning is to understand Heaven and to apply this understanding to social, family and personal life, and it is therefore a process of generating virtue within and learning to be a person of virtue." (Xinzhong, 2000:213)

To achieve this, Confucianism promotes virtues such as loyalty, filial piety, continence and righteousness which are encompassed by the five constants: humaneness, justice, proper rite, knowledge and integrity.

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

When Lawrence Kohlberg adapted Jean Piaget's psychological theory of the moral development of children, he defined in three levels with two stages each:

The first level is the **Pre-Conventional level**, including the first stage in which the individual's reasoning for his or her moral actions are obedience and punishment oriented. In the second stage, the individual's moral actions are self-interest oriented. Both are most commonly seen in children.

The second level is the **Conventional level**, which is the most typical form of moral reasoning for the majority of adolescents and adults in the world. It includes the third stage, where the individual orientates his or her reasoning for moral actions through interpersonal accords and conformity, looking for role models and conforming to social standards. In the fourth stage the individual's moral reasoning evolves beyond the need for outside approval as he or she accepts and obeys the laws and social conventions, dictated to him or her by society to maintain social order.

The third level is the **Post-Conventional level**. It holds stage five, in which the individual orientates his or her moral actions on his or her own values which can contradict those of the social norm, but are still respected by the individual, choosing the best outcome for the majority. The sixth stage is one of universal ethical principles, in which the individual's moral reasoning focuses on universal ethical principles, accepting laws only if they are vested in justice. This level is achieved by only a low percentage of people, but Kohlberg emphasizes that people should try to reach stage six. It should be noted that all stage- and level-transitions are fluent.

Formal Moral Education

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

The ethical difference between China and the West is found in the Confucian consideration of both moral rightness and

affection in contrast to European individualism.

Chinese culture, long influenced by Confucian values, is oriented towards collectivist values and the maintenance of harmony; conflicts are resolved by reconciliation and collective decisions rather than by individual choice, commitment, and responsibility as in the West.

The mainland Chinese school system does not do much to help its students develop their own understanding of morals and ethics. Even though students receive what is referred to as "moral training" in elementary school, this "training" mainly teaches young students to love their nation, and the Communist Party. Furthermore, any form of moral or ethical education is completely missing from middle- or high school curricula, and as such, in their adolescence, students have to further develop a sense of ethics on their own.

Even with the rapidly changing Chinese way of life that challenges most instances of traditional thought, family-internal relationships remain largely unaffected. Consequently, family members, and especially elder siblings from whom Chinese adolescents seek counsel, as well as the parents remain an immense factor in the moral development of their children throughout their youth. As a result, an undertone of Confucian values prevailed, even if not necessarily understood by all as "Confucian" and is still transmitted from generation to generation. This happened despite the Communist Party trying its best to establish its ideology and itself in place of Confucian tradition in the 1970s in a movement known as Anti-Confucianism.

The lack of formal instruction in ethics makes it difficult for young Chinese to reach the level of Post-Conventional thought that Kohlberg describes, and a study by Fang et al. suggests that young adults in China are far more likely to regard stage four as the final stage than their Western counterparts.

JAPAN

After World War Two the Japanese government replaced the old curriculum for moral education, which was called *shūshin*, with one named *dōtoku*. Both share many similarities with the Confucian tradition, but the latter contains a much stronger inclusion of Western culture, such as role models etc. Students are admonished to learn self-awareness, to relate with other people, groups and society as well as with nature and the

universe. This learning process is supported by letting the students already take on active roles during their school life through cleaning duties, preparing for school- and sports-festivals and so on. Even though the curriculum of moral education in Japan is still evolving, to try to integrate both Japanese as well as Western values for students to understand and take with them into the society as working adults, it already guides them properly to Kohlberg's Conventional level and lays a foundation for students to reach the Post-Conventional Level of moral reasoning.

SOUTH KOREA

In South Korea there is no institutionalized moral education until senior high school and college because the junior high curriculum focuses on preparing the young students for entrance exams. The course of "civil ethics" in senior high school focuses on subjects such as human beings and ethics, tradition of thought, culture and morality, society and morality, the state and morality and the defense of the country and national unification. While moral education at college level focuses on social development and contemporary morality, Korean tradition and thoughts, ideals and realities of democracy, criticism of communism, economic development and morality, environmental issues and direction for the nation. In these courses moral values are not entirely indoctrinated, teachers guide the students through moral dilemmas and try to nurture their abstract thinking. Therefore, not only "the matter of what" but also "the matter of how" becomes an extremely valuable asset. The main goal of these classes is that the students attain values mandatory for level 2 (after Kohlberg) and preferably reach level 3 or at least lay a foundation for the students to reach level 3.

Results

According to our sources the biggest mutual influence between the People's Republic of China, Japan and South Korea is based on Confucianism and its evolution. Even though often not noticed and uncredited, Confucianism is still the base of moral and ethical values in East Asian countries. Those values are the foundation of the social environment and aim to help people to reach the second level after Lawrence Kohlberg, as well as to

give people the opportunity to later on reach the third level on their own. Most of the Confucian values are still lived today, especially with regards to loyalty, filial piety, continence, proper rite and knowledge. It should be pointed out that western philosophy had a major impact on East Asia as an aftermath of the Second World War.

Another important conclusion of our research was that in spite of moral education in schools the family plays a major part in moral and ethical education for young adults.

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