The Effectiveness of a Moral Education Curriculum in Increasing Life Satisfaction and Moral Reasoning of Adolescent in China

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XiaoDong Liu, Advisor

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Yao Xiao

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ABSTRACT

The Effectiveness of a Moral Education Curriculum in Increasing Life Satisfaction and Moral Reasoning of Adolescent in China

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By Yao Xiao

The purpose of the present study is to assess the effectiveness of a moral education intervention program in increasing life satisfaction and cognitive development of Chinese teenagers. This moral education program was designed to integrate popular moral theories (e.g., dilemma solution, emotion, habituation) to foster adolescents’ growth in moral development. The whole intervention is to be administered over a period of two semesters. Participants undergoing this moral education program will be compared to a control group that takes part in traditional moral classes for the same amount of time. The proposed study aims to compare the cognitive development of the intervention and control groups to determine whether the intervention can lead to a higher moral cognitive reasoning and life satisfaction, comparing to control schools. In addition, the difference between experimental group and control will be larger in the students of higher grade level. Finally, I propose to compare the difference in effectiveness of this intervention between teenagers in cities and rural areas.
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The Effectiveness of a Moral Education Curriculum in Increasing Life Satisfaction and Moral Reasoning of Adolescent in China

Throughout history, in countries all over the world, education has had two great goals: to help young people become smart and to help them become good, said Lickona (1989). In China, public education is concerned with moral development, too. The tension persists between the nationalist value emphasized by the Chinese Communist Party and the individualism emerged by today’s integrated economic environment. On the one hand, pedagogues do not spark a skeptical attitude toward political propaganda; while on the other hand, students tend to pursue freedom of speech encouraged by the flourish of economy (Clark, 2008). Thus, a new program on moral education that is independent of government’s coercion should be established.

Moral education, sometimes understood as character building or value education is designed to influence the character and well-being of the younger generation in a positive manner (Knowles & McLean, 1992; Ryan & Lickona, 1992). This is characterized by the acquisition of virtues (e.g., honesty, loyalty, charity) and the eschewing of vices (e.g., greed, lust, lying), and the understanding of human behaviors that is shaped by common moral principles. The notion of morality as “good and bad”, “right and wrong” was proposed by pre-Socratic philosopher, Democritus, (Kahn, 1985); and the notion of morality was confirmed in the dialogues of Plato (Nails, 2002). Ancient views of morality, such as those of Plato and Aristotle, suggested that morality is the excellence of human beings and the pursuit of moral excellence overrides any other kind
of pursuit for personal pleasure (Hare, 1965). Similarly, Kant (1785/1993) explained that a moral person is distinguished from the empirical self-interested human. The goal of Kant’s rational moral agent is a good will; while, the theory of Nietzsche (Nietzsche, Kaufmann, & Hollingdale, 1968) stressed that self-cultivation lies at the heart of a civilized humanity.

The proposed study does not focus on the debate of philosophical goals or the justification of morality, but rather on the moral education methods in responses to current morality concerns in China. However, a discussion on moral education interventions cannot be separated from the understanding of morality and its related theories. Ellrod (1992) stated that philosophy gives moral education its goal, whereas psychological theories give moral education reasoning and course of actions.

**Morality in Psychology**

Historically, morality has been addressed more often by philosopher and focused mainly in government polices and its application (Thomson & Tredennick, 1976; Kant, 1785), falling outside the scope of science. Psychology, adopting a scientific methodology, provides a bridge between the philosophical foundations of moral principles and the empirical works of educational theories (Knowles & McLean, 1992; Walker & Frimer, 2011). The signs of change from philosophical morality to moral development could be seen in the movement of dynamic psychology shaped by Charcot’s three students, Binet, Freud, and Piaget (Nucci, 1998). Binet (1905) is well known for his contribution to child cognitive development. Freud’s (1927) psychoanalysis suggests that unconscious superego development is the major force of human moral development.
Thus, moral development of children also requires the identification and modeling behaviors/moral decisions with same-sex parents. After the rise of behaviorism (Skinner, 1971), a theory focusing only on direct observable behaviors, the cognitive-development process in moral development was downplayed for a while. Piaget’s (1965) published work in the underlying cognitive structures of moral thinking and its function in children behaviors brought the psychologists’ attention back to cognition aspects of moral development. His stages of cognitive development corresponding to chronological ages and the environmental influences (e.g., parents at early ages) gave rise to the stage for moral education and inspired Kohlberg (1969) in his works of moral decision, which later became the most influential theory in contemporary morality study.

Kohlberg’s (1969) cognitive-development model dominated the field of moral development, even among the influence of behaviorism (Skinner, 1971; Watson, 1928) and social learning theory (Miller & Dollard, 1941) on moral development. Kohlberg’s (1969, 1981) theory adopted Kant’s (1985) philosophy that treats morality as the justification of action, and modified on Piaget’s (1965) stages of cognitive development.

The theory proposed by Kohlberg (1971) is a differential stage sequential theory, with three levels of moral reasoning (personal, conventional, and principled) and two stages within each level. Stage 1 (heteronomy) emphasizes on children’s understanding of right and wrong through outcome. Stage 2 (exchange) says that one’s interest and moral behaviors only occur through simple exchange based on relativism. Stage 3 (expectations) and Stage 4 (social system and conscience) are typical of adolescents and adults. Stage 3 centers on gaining acceptance through fulfilling expectations, and stage 4 focuses on the obedience of social order or law. The final stages, Stage 5 (prior rights and
social contract) and Stage 6 (universal ethical principle) hypothesizes that one is a separate entity from the society, thus one’s own values (e.g., justice, human rights) may come before social order or law (Kohlberg, Boyd, & Levine, 1990). It was suggested that individuals classified in the higher stages are “better” in solving moral dilemmas, and that individuals don’t alter much between the stages (Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983; Walker, Gustafson, & Frimer, 2007). Accordingly, Kohlberg and his followers claimed that by gathering cross-sectional, longitudinal, and cross-cultural data, his theory is cross-culturally applicable and thus morality is universal (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987).

Other stage theories of cognitive development include Loevinger’s (1976) stages of ego development theory, Fowler’s (1981) stages of faith development, and Perry’s (1970) theory regarding both the intellectual and the ethical development of the college students. Perry studied the 4-year college experience and mentioned that larger cognitive and ethical growths are achieved in students who are able to turn learning materials to personal values. The early stages of Perry’s theory are much similar to the thought of Kohlberg’s stage 2 and 3. Perry’s theory contributes to the moral interventions of higher education.

Although, many theories are in line with Kohlberg’s sequential stage theory, Neo-Kohlbergian theorists hypothesize that moral reasoning is allocate in specific schemas (Rest, 1979). Rest (1979) proposed three moral schemas (personal interest, maintaining norms and post-conventional), knowledge structures which assist in information storage and processing. Moral reasoning could shift across those schemas. Besides, Gilligan (1982) criticizes Kohlberg’s stage theory on its exclusion of other values. Kohlberg’s stage theory solely emphasizes on the ethic of justice and its application to both gender,
whereas Gilligan argued that men are characterized by the ethic of justice and women are differentiated in the sense that women are dominated by the ethic of care. She stated that this ethic orientation is consistent within each gender. However, critics such as Sommers (1986) and Walker (2006) conducted empirical examinations and the results were inconsistent with Gilligan’s claims. Only 60% of studied people have the same orientation on two moral dilemmas (Pratt, Golding, Hunter, & Sampson, 1988); and no gender differences were shown in the meta-analysis of 113 orientation studies, in both the hypothetical dilemmas studies (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000a, 2000b) and in the real-life dilemmas studies (Walker, de Vries, & Trevethan, 1987).

Moreover, Kohlberg’s theory defines morality as universal, therefore moral theories are often cross-culturally applicable. Turiel (1983) questioned this notion and proposed the domain theory. He suggested that there are three domains in morality practices. The first domain is universally applicable morality which is based on common principles (e.g., justice, rights and human welfare). The second domain is called conventional domain which is relates to distinguished social rules and norms in cultures. The last domain concerns individual’s control over personal rights. The domain theory was criticized as a simplistic sketch to illustrate domains (Okin, 1989). In addition, Haidt (2001, 2008) argued that moral decisions are often made without reasoning of justice, but with “gut feelings” which he called it the intuitive decisions.

One problem, however, of the notion on moral cognition is that it tends to slight the moral competencies of young children, who are largely inarticulate on moral reasoning. Some philosophers prefer the view of an inborn moral person such as Confucius (McGreal, 1955; Wei, 1996), whereas most of the psychologists (Freud, 1927;
Kohlberg, 1981; Piaget, 1965) believed that we are born as amoral animals. Our attention shifts to early conscience development (Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007) and the importance of various moral emotions (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Sadovsky, 2006) in psychology. Toddlers who are only 2 years old showed distress and sign of conscience after seeing flawed objects or when they damaged objects (Kagan, 1981; Kochanska, Casey, & Fukumoto, 1995). A more recent research study conducted by Hamlin et al. (2007, 2010) in Yale University assessed 6- and 10- month-old infants’ intuitions about social interactions and their preference for morality understanding: babies watched three-dimensionally displayed puppets acting out the helping/hindering situations. They found that almost all the babies reached out for the helpful individual. A growing body of evidence suggests that humans do have a predisposed moral sense, moral judgment and moral feeling.

In support, Hoffman’s (2000) stage theory hypothesizes that emotion such as empathy emerges early in infants’ life and is biologically predisposed in human. He reasoned that empathy during childhood is largely dominated by emotional aspects, namely the emotional distress caused by witnessing pain of others. Cognitive aspects then come to play at the school ages to interlink with emotions. The empathy showed by children at this age is mixed with emotional and personal viewpoint. At a later age, children are able to show empathy in difficult circumstances and in various social environments. Shame and guilt are strongly related to morality and interact with empathy in the cognitive moral development (Hoffman, 2000).

Much of those later works are built on Kohlberg’s cognitive structural framework or were an implicit reaction to it, including the neo-Kohlbergian’s (Rest, Narvaez,
Bebeau & Thoma, 1999) moral schemas, Gilligan’s (1982) gender-related moral
difference, Turiel’s (1983) domain notion of morality and Haidt’s (2001) moral intuition
and deliberative reasoning. Although Kohlberg’s theory is the most well developed and
empirically supported in moral psychology, Darley (1993) acknowledged the
separateness of the four references for morality in psychology (beliefs, intentions,
feelings, and actions) and stress the importance of all moral theories.

**Moral Education**

Moral Education emerged from ancient Greece (Arthur, 2008). The significance
of morality concepts was acknowledged during the Enlightenment period, and it was
transformed into practical curriculum and utilized in American school system in the late
19th century (Arthur, 2008). The schools assumed their traditional role of moral
education upon the demand of the public, and aimed to help students in achieving
individual happiness and community wellness through educating children with the right
virtues and proper attitudes such as caring, fairness and responsibility (Pearson &
Nicholson, 2000). A number of moral education interventions have been developed (e.g.,
Lickona, 1996; Park & Peterson, 2008). One of the best known is the Josephson Institute
of Ethics’ (2009) Six Pillars of Character namely, caring, respect, responsibility, honesty,
trustworthiness, and citizenship. The call for those moral models to be embedded into
school mission and all teaching curriculums was rather strong (Arthur & Wilson, 2010;
Lickona, 1992). Ayers (2011) analyzed 421 community college mission statements, and
found that most school’s missions involve moral aspects such as responsibility, respect
and citizenship. Narvaez (2010) also stressed that a “sustaining school climate” is of
important in the education of moral development as it is the only way to habituated
students with moral sense and moral behavior. The call for moral development as one of the aims of common schooling is popular in developed democratic countries such as United Kingdom and the United States (Carr, 2008).

In the history of all classical and heroic societies, moral principles are told by reading stories to the young (MacIntyre, 1981). Moral education in the Western world was mainly based on storytelling of the ancient heroes (e.g., Achilles and Odysseus, Hector and Aeneas, Beowulf, Arthur and Percival) (MacIntyre, 1981). Although some researchers argued that some of the hero stories are not culturally specified and are not norm based. Stories involving virtues and moral themes were still effective in teaching moral principles to the youngsters even in contemporary time (Kilpatrick, 1992; Lickona, 1991; Wynne & Ryan, 1997). Books presenting moral and ethical codes such as McGuffey’s *Eclectic Readers* (1836/1992) and Bennett’s *The Book of Virtues* have sold a hundred million copies to families and community schools (Damon, 2005). These texts show simple virtues to children such as respect, honesty, diligence, benevolence, fair-mindedness and cleanliness. Some scholars believe that great hero stories teach children traditional moral principles, and foster children’s empathy towards people in need by vivid portraying of moral and immoral characters (Honig, 1987; Nash, 1997). Some traditional character educators such as Kilpatrick (1992) even advise teachers to step back and not interfere with the power of the stories themselves.

However, some scholars doubted the effect of storytelling on fostering children’s moral development. They argued that few studies were done to test its effect (Leming, 1997). To argue against the story reading method of moral education, Narvaez and his colleagues (1998, 1999, 2002) conducted several experiments on third grade, fifth grade
and college students. Convincing results were shown that some children are not able to extract right moral themes (the core concepts of the story, see Williams, 1993) from the moral stories which contain dilemmas. For instance, some children extract message like “Don’t be alone in the jungle” or “Don’t scratch or look around while eating” after reading the “The Monkey and the Rabbit” when the real theme of this story is accepting others as they are, rather than trying to change them. Moreover, children safety is high priority in parents’ minds and in home education, some children interpreted the core meaning of “The Three Little Pigs” story as not to trust strangers (Lehr, 1991). These studies suggested that meaning extraction from stories could be influenced by children’s prior knowledge (van den Broek, 1994; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). At this point, one might anticipate detailed instructions from traditional character educators about how to make sure that children extract right moral message from a story.

Williams, Brown, Silerstein, and De Cani (1994) successfully trained fifth and sixth grade children on theme extraction with structured questions before, during and after story reading. Grusec’s (2006) research also found that an accurate perception of the delivered message by children is achieved through clarity, repetition, and consistency. Also, an acceptance of the message depends on a warm relationship and the child’s belief that the value was self-generated rather than externally imposed. Thus, Klemann (2011) argues that Newbery's attempt to cultivate moral behavior becomes radically efficacious through the incorporation of physical objects in his didactic children’s books.

Additionally, computer science, which enables self-generated narratives, was utilized in moral education. Bers (2001) of the MIT media lab developed a three dimensional multi-user virtual environment, Zora, to engage children in self-generated
narratives and social rules based on moral conflicts discussion in their virtual city. For example, asked by the mayor of the virtual city, children vote and provide reasons for why to have or not to have a jail in their virtual world. In general, although children are not able to extract core concepts from the stories until Grade 4, they are able to outline the stories (Goldman et al., 1984; Taylor, 1986) and the memories of those moral stories would enable a faster cognitive growth at a later age (Papousek, H., & Popousek, M., 1995).

The closest approximation to a story is the presentation of a moral dilemma, which Narvaez (1998) proposed as an alternative to storytelling in moral education. It was inspired by Kohlberg’s moral dilemma interview technique. Kohlberg’s (1984) stages raise the question of how one progress through the stages. By observing children in family context, Kohlberg stated that the stage progression is achieved by acknowledging disequilibrium in moral dilemmas. Thus, parents should encourage children to elicit their own opinions, pose appropriate questions to children and check for understanding while moral dilemma occurs in plays. The questions in Kohlberg’s Moral Judgment Interview (MJI) which was intended to “test the limits” of people’s moral understanding best illustrate moral dilemmas: for example, a man who contemplates stealing a drug for his dying wife, survivors in fallout shelter debating whether to admit outsiders to their sanctuary (Cobly & Kohlberg, 1987). No right or wrong answers are required for these dilemmas, but reasoning provided on moral decisions is crucial for determining moral stage. It emphasized structure over content (in ignoring real-life dilemmas), and rights and duties over questions of good and reasoning over action (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977; Kohlberg, 1980). Kohlberg and his colleagues carried out
programs and research using classroom moral dilemma discussions and successfully demonstrated its contribution in increasing MJI scores (Blatt & Kohlberg, 1975; Colby, Kohlberg, Fenton, Speicher-Dubin, & Lieberman, 1977).


McCaffrey’s (2008) Hollywood Film Clips in promoting character development uses moral dilemmas in this perspective, with self-related instructional questions. For example, the focus question for the “Lord of Ring” clip when Frodo volunteers to destroy the ring is “have you ever taken a risk to accomplish a group goal”. His film clips moral class had begun in Georgia middle schools where an optimistic result has shown in students’ accountability and later spread throughout the district.

Furthermore, moral dilemma discussions provide communicative skills for deliberations in other contexts and academic subjects: sports, biology, physics, religion and history. Instructional strategies in teacher’s education have been described frequently (e.g., Galbraith & Jones, 1976; Lind, 2003; Oser & Althof, 1992). Teachers’ duties to clarify moral dilemmas in all context of school time have been stressed by some scholars to achieve the goal of building a moral climate in schools (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Toremen, 2011; Traub, 2005; Williams, 2010).

The other largely used method in contemporary moral education is emotion and intuition focused (Damon, 2005; Darley, 2011). Empathy has long been proved to be
related to morality development. Hoffman’s (1982) work on empathy stresses the interaction of the affective (empathic distress: observing someone in need) and cognitive components (awareness of one’s own responsibilities for the distress). Guilt as one of the empathy affects, indicated by Hoffman is resulted from doing harm and being responsible for that harm. It also includes the empathic distress result from a failure to help someone in distress. His research showed that guilt is learned. Children could become aware of the effects of their actions on others when parents teach them the concept of guilt. In addition, empathic anger directed at the victimizer is another important focus of moral development. It was viewed by Averill (1982) as a function in emotional responses that serves to uphold accepted standards of conduct (e.g., redressing wrongs, correcting injustices, and defending the rights of self and others). In general, Hoffman (1987) claimed that empathy must be stressed by the moral curriculum. The teaching of empathy, morality in particular is connected to the interdependent cultures of communalism in which the fulfillment of social duties and responsibilities in promoting the well-being of the group is of importance (Hoffman, 2000). This occurs through interactions with peers and adults in both school and family contexts. Thus, moral curriculum modules needs to include both social and emotional learning that focused on self-other relationships (Jagers, 2001). Research studies have shown better emotion regulation in low-income African American children after attending formal after-school programs (Posner & Vandell, 1999). Furthermore, Haidt (2002) proposed that intuition as a form of feeling could also be trained in moral decisions. Narvaez et al. (2006) study on moral expertise and moral novices supported the expertise intuition theory which states that repeated addressing of
moral issues intentionally and deliberatively could train the intuition system in managing similar moral issues and conflicts.

The last but not the least, co-curricular activities such as social learning curriculum had its stand in promoting individual’s morality (Dodge, Laura, & Cate, 2002; Edwards, 1986). Moral relevant co-curricular activities often conducted through voluntarily service work. For instance, the community of caring school achieved a moral climate in school by reforming a program that initially focused on risk prevention, to include student’s community services (Higgins-D Alessandro, Choe, Guo & Elgendy, 2008). Post-Kohlberg developmental approach also involves promoting social-emotional climate and increasing service learning opportunities in school contexts (Nucci, 1998). Moreover, there are more particular efforts in character development, for instance, Weiss (2011) proposed that physical education with health goal has a potential for promoting positive youth development (behavior and psychosocial assets). While Traub (2005) reported that painful confrontations are common in classrooms of Hyde private high school, as students act as the guardians of the conscience of others. The Hyde school also holds “regional meetings” for parents every month, family weekends at campus twice a year and three days family learning program every year.

Increasing interest in character education has occurred among policy makers and education professionals. However, schools are hesitated to do anything that might detract them from the goal of increasing academic performance. Glanzer, Ream, Villarreal, and Davis (2004) used an institutional-structural model of inquiry, and identified the degree to which ethics education exists in 173 Christian colleges and universities. Their results indicate that almost all students receive some form of ethics education. However, only
one-third of these schools require an ethics course within their general education curriculum. Pires and Garrafa (2011) also revealed that only 51% of 340 teachers took sides with the inclusion of a discipline that deals with bioethics in the curricular structure of a high school. Thus, Benninga, Berkowitz, and Kuehn (2006) tried to show that it is misguided to sacrifice moral curriculum for academic performance. They found that higher rankings on the Academic Performance Index (API) and higher scores on the SAT-9 were significantly and positively correlated with four of our character education indicators, namely, a school's ability to ensure a clean and safe physical environment, a school's parents and teachers have been exemplars in promoting good character, high-quality opportunities at the school for students to contribute in meaningful ways to the school and its community, and promoting a caring community and positive social relationships.

In general, moral education in a multi-dimensional discipline is still in a researching and developing stage. Killen and Smetana (2006) commended the contemporary applied work: in order to be effective, a program must be comprehensive and geared toward changing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral moral tendencies at multiple levels (e.g., within individuals, institutions, and communities). Toremen (2011) interviewed faculty of education in the 2009-2010 academic year and found that four values should be internalized (attitudes towards school, voluntary social activities, tolerance education and sharing) in order for students to acquire social sensitivity and responsibility. Elias, DeFinì, and Bergmann (2010) best illustrated this by her Social Emotional and Character Development (SECD) program, which developed, based on many moral theories. SECD mainly focused on teacher’s techniques to foster student’s
moral habits in all aspects, emphasizing on empathy to others, showing positive and negative reactions to student’s behaviors, as well as encouraging service learning and volunteer experience. However, Sparks (2010) examined moral education programs in 84 schools and concluded that the school-wide character development programs only increased teachers’ use of character development instruction. The programs were not efficient in exercising the school wide strategies related to character building, teachers’ attitudes, and teachers' use of routine classroom practices (engaging students in decision-making). The increasing in student’s helping behaviors faded after two years. Some programs argued that the study did not follow the students long enough to see more slow-developing results. Another study conducted by Mayhew, Seifert and Pascarella (2010) investigated the co-curricular experiences, course-taking behaviors, and educational practices that influence the moral reasoning development of 1,469 first-year students at 19 American colleges and universities. Results showed that contexts and practices that encourage students to engage in divergent perspectives when approaching a problem are those most conducive to moral reasoning growth.

Moral Education History and Its Current Concerns in China

Moral education is closely associated with politics in China. We could even trace its roots in the foundation of morality discussion, that is, the famous ethical philosophy of China, the Confucianism. Remarked by many scholars, Confucianism has been an important source of ethical and moral inspiration for China over the centuries (Ivanhoe, 2000; Tiles, 2000). Five of 30 kinds of virtues that later scholars considered as the foundations of Chinese morality culture (Ding, 1997; Zeng, 1996;) are 1. Jen (Benevolence): associated with the famous quote of Confucius which later became the
Golden Rule in China “Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you”  
(Confucius Analects 15:23). 2. Yi (Rightness): means thinking, saying and doing the right things, instead of focusing on personal profit or gain. 3. Li (Propriety): is the observance of rites. 4. Zhi (Wisdom): symbolizes the power of learning. 5. Cheng (Trustworthiness): contains trust, faithfulness, and sincerity (Analects of Confucius, 1994). To Confucius, Jen, Yi, Li, Zhi, and Cheng are all human nature. Confucius is probably the first in Chinese culture to emphasize the education of morality. The following passage is the best expression of Confucius’s idea: "The Ordinance of Heaven (Tian) is what we call the law of nature. To fulfill the law of nature is what we call the way. To cultivate the way is what we call education" (Kong, 1996: Doctrine of the Mean, chap. 1). Confucius emphasized the topic of Mandate of Heaven, which postulates that heaven would bless the authority of a just ruler (Zeng, 1996).

In the later time of Confucius, however, Li was idealized by political community to maintain social order and to serve political control during the Warring States (Norden, 2007). Norden (2007) noticed that the modified Li has severed to justify absolute obedience to the authorities (rulers). Thus, Shen and Tran (1992) mentioned Taoism, one of the metaphysics at the same time, emerged as the critique of the Confucian ethics. Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism, argued against the anthropocentric ethical orientation in Confucius’s theory. Instead, Tao (the “way” in Confucius) was explained by Lao Tzu as the mother of heaven and earth. Different from Confucius’s education of virtues, a sage in Tao is an infant with all-embracing spontaneity, innocence, simplicity, originality, generosity, and self-forgetfulness. To achieve Tao is to return to the purest state, return to
harmony and according to Taoism, a conscious man is therefore a more autonomous man. Man is always conscious of Tao for this reason (Shen & Tran, 1992).

Later in time, neo-Confucianism that reinterpreted Confucianism and combined it with the work of Taoism, became mainstream. A neo-Confucianist, Wang Yang-Ming (1472–1529) called the human nature as moral conscience and it is innate but could be lost through lustful desire and calculative intellect (Lokuang, 1992). At this time, China reached the peak of philosophy and the peak of worshipping God. Virtues and moral acts were severed as ways to become closer to “Tian” (personal God or Heaven), which was seen as an umpire (Norden, 2007).

However, religious beliefs (God or Heaven) have been diminishing as the freedom of religious belief was allowed after the founding of People’s Republic of China in 1949 (Lee & Ho, 2005). Further, Confucian thoughts were officially denounced during the Cultural Revolution in 1966 (Lee & Ho, 2005). As one of few remaining communist countries, Marxist philosophy is a mandatory course in higher institutes during 1949-1966 (Chu, 1977). Moral education in China since then was as essentially a means to political socialization (Meyer, 1990; Zhong, 2004). The Chinese Communist Party (1988, p.356) announced, “Moral education is ideological and political education. It plays an important role in upholding the socialist nature of the school”. The term “moral education” (daode jiaoyu) is also called ideological education (sixiang jiaoyu) or political education (zhengzhi jiaoyu) and moral qualities are coined as ideopolitical-moral qualities (sixiang zhengzhi sushi) (see People’s Republic of China State Education Commission, 1990). Chinese students study “virtues text” in primary school followed by “political’ texts in
secondary and high school, and then “Marxist theory” “Ideology and Morality” and “law of foundation” texts in higher institutions (Cheung & Pan, 2006).

Since the launch of modernization, it was felt increasingly necessary to teach young citizens to develop personal qualities that would match features of the market economy (Lee, 2002). Since the 1980s, the scope of moral education has been broadened from its original emphasis on the indoctrination of socialist values to law education, psychology health, and knowledge of life (State Education Committee, 1986; 1995b). Shanghai education research institute (2002) also reported a need for “four-have” people: those who have ideals; have morals; have discipline; and have culture (education). To become one of the ‘four-have’, one should possess three characteristics: a strong sense of justice; a specialization complemented by diverse abilities; and globally versatile knowledge and skills (Hu & Jiang, 2002). Moreover, as an effort (mainly from the public) to disassociated moral education from politics, Guangdong Education Press published, “The new three character classic” (Editorial Committee, 1995), an adaptation of the traditional “Three character classic” used as literary text 500 years ago. The Classic places much emphasis on such personal values such as ‘diligence’, ‘enthusiasm in learning’ and ‘conscience’, as well as social/ cultural values such as ‘filial piety’, ‘patriotism’ and ‘self-sacrifice’. Values related to politics, such as patriotism, were relatively unmentioned.

However, moral education in China still has less interest and is attended less and is less progressive (Xin, 2004). Fairbrother (2011) claimed that the methods of moral education are simplistic and boring, which stress moral indoctrination but overlook its practicality. The politics class imbibes students with political theories, which are
relatively more abstract than the content of other courses and not easy for students to grasp. Without ever encouraging students to participate in class discussion, politics teaching that consist of lecturing, indoctrination, and memorizing ultimately afflicts students with weariness. Furthermore, Kodelja (2011) urges that education for patriotism is morally unacceptable; the promotion of patriotism should practice through social services and government policies related to public trust.

By the beginning of the 21st century, the world started questioning the lost of morality practices in China. The front-page headline of The Globe and Mail (2011, October 17): “One child. Two hit-and-run drivers. 18 people pass by without stopping. Millions see it, hear of it, and ask: Has China lost its soul?” was but one data point. Other moral disregarded behaviors, non-sanguinary but still terribly disrupted and eroded the values and the culture of China. Reflecting on the current apathetic moral behaviors, Professor Xia commented that one of the causes behind those behaviors stems from the PengYu case in 2006, in which an old woman successfully sued Peng who helped her to the hospital after seeing her fall down at a bus station (Global Times, 2011, October 20). In today’s China, the value built up in young people is self-centered and money-worshipping theory rather than a positive attitude fostered by morality. University students began to lose confidence in the communist leadership and furthermore to question Marxism, Leninism and Mao Ze-dong thoughts (Rosen, 1989). Yang (1997) then commented that a belief crisis has prevailed.

The Proposed Study

The Chinese Communist Party (2011, October 25) announced a reforming of deepened cultural restructuring based on Marxist Theory in the urgency of the current the
crisis. However, the question of how to technically shape moral character remains essentially unanswered. This is a condition that creates doubt and debates among educators in China. *Globe Times* (2011, October 20) reported that a primary school in northwest China made students who have committed acts of wrong-doings (e.g., cheating, fighting) or performed poorly in academic to wear green scarves. It is urgent for the government and schools of China to introduce an appropriate moral education curriculum.

The concerns could be summarized as

(1) Increased instrumental courses in teaching skills for passing particular tests.

(2) The decline of public morality and the rise of anomic and nihilistic behaviors, particularly among youth.

(3) The need to find politically and publicly acceptable substitute for the educational role that religion has often formerly played.

Most Western philosophers ascribe selfishness, cruelty, and other forms of moral depravity to human emotion and hence argue for the development of reasoning as the bridle to emotion. Yet, the ancient Chinese see the forms of moral excellence, such as gentleness, kindness, and honesty, as the product of human emotion and hence had not emphasized the significance of reasoning. However, the need for an integrative moral education program that combined Western’s reasoning and China’s emotion-based morality is essential in the current globalised economy.

The present study aims to design a multi-level moral education curriculum that involves emotional, behavioral and cognitive aspects as proposed by Killen and Smetana (2006). This new moral curriculum will efficiently teaches basic moral understanding (both knowledge and affection) to young children, will develops adolescents’ ability to
handle multifaceted moral events and will prepare Chinese students with moral habituation. This curriculum emphasizes depoliticized moral education and a global perspective (international justice) to prepare children as an integrated member of the globalised world.

Kohlberg (1981, 1984) reasoned that the progression in cognitive development stages is largely depended on age. Thoma (1986) also found that age and education are critical in predicting the level of moral judgment after examine the DIT data. The present study will take the age factor into account and have distinct curriculum plans (which are moral knowledge, emotions focused, reasoning focused, and habituation focused) for primary grade levels, secondary and high schools. According to the literature reviews, westerners try to integrate interdependent values into character building. Whereas Chinese children, compared to American students, undergo greater orientation toward social engagement and greater concern with authority, as is indicated in Wang and Leichtman’s (2000) narratives study. This cultural tradition, functioning together with other social factors, such as the population pressure, economical and political systems, helps shaping a group-based, teacher-dominated, and highly structured pedagogical culture. Teachers are habituated to conduct expositive teaching, and students are used to be passive learners (Zhang, 2004). Thus, it is important for the present study to cultivate independent thinking such that students could tell right from wrong without appealing to authority. Higher institutions are excluded from this study, because the ultimate goal of this moral education curriculum is to help students to form a moral personality (see Colby & Damon, 1992) which will enable them to engage voluntarily and actively in moral acts at the beginning of their university life.
Proposed Moral Education Curriculum by Grade Level

Primary School Curriculum - Grade 1 to Grade 3

Virtue memorization will be the main method in teaching morality to the lower grades students. For grade 1, the teaching material will be the well-published “New Three character classic” text. Considering children’s reading skills, psychologists should read the virtues to the children of first grade, and then gradually teach them to read by themselves. Stories that relevant to virtuous behavior should aid the moral study in Grade 2. Story theme interpretation should always be given to the children. For example, the story of “Kongrong shares the pears’ may interpreted as respect to the elderly and love toward the young on the traditional cultural context; and it could also be seen in a boarder sense as a sacrifice of personal interest. In Grade 3, Hero stories should dominate the moral teaching, the concepts of sacrificing oneself for a greater good and remonstrate with one’s superior should be the track. Implanting these concepts will be extremely difficult as it is against parents’ will in protecting their children in any sense. Thus, this should be preceded with emphasis on security issues. Finally, there should be an emphasis on the positive aspect of the stories and the virtue of the protagonist.

Primary School Curriculum - Grade 4 to Grade 6

The moral education that focused on the inducement of feeling will be used from grade 4 to grade 6. It becomes increasingly clear that one of the most important emotions in the development of moral character is empathy. A concern for others based on the awareness of their needs and distress precedes the awareness of moral principles; this therefore could be fostered early in the life of children. The curriculum would be guided by Hoffman’s (1982) five speculations: direct experience of emotions, attention to the
feelings of the victim, given affection, role taking and role model. The teaching material for this class is very flexible as it is based on the analysis of news. Teachers could bring any news that has moral implications, either domestic or international, to share and discuss with the class. The discussion should be focused on emotional aspects by asking morality related questions such as “What do you feel after hearing this news?” and “Does that bother you much to hear this kind of news?” Students’ attention to the feelings of the victim could be called by asking them to imagine if they are the victims in the event. For instance, the recent tsunami in Japan, teacher could ask students to imagine the feeling of losing their parents and home. Another way to relate the news to individual: “what do you think you will do if you were in the hit-and-run scene (Global Times, 2011)?” At the end, to help children empathize with someone else’s emotion, teachers could encourage the students to talk about similar experience of their own. Understanding and reasoning could be integrated in the discussion, for example “Why do you think the bystanders act that way?” In order to promote student’s initiative in topics of morality, students should be encouraged to bring news to share with the class. In addition, role-playing could be added sometimes in classroom to sharpen children’s cognitive sense of the others.

Secondary School Curriculum

The solution of moral dilemma will be introduced to the students of secondary school. Teacher presents the dilemma in text and then collects it back after children are done with reading. The teacher should ask students to re-tell the story and present their understanding of the problem with questions such as "What is at stake here?", "Why is that problem hard to solve?" or "Why might person A have decided that way?" A limited time should be given to make assertion under pressure. Two or three common opinions
on the issue should be selected and clearly written on the board. Further, students vote for
the dilemma solution presented on the board and form two or three teams depending on
the voting. Each team should prepare reasons to support their stand and defend against
the other team’s points. At last, teacher should explain the principles and rules, but be
aware that any opinions from the students are acceptable. The dilemma used in the
classroom could be created a modification of an event in actual life. For example, a
dilemma question based on YueYue’s case could be “Suppose there was a stranger who
tried to save YueYue’s life in the hit-and-run case, but he died when saving this child”.
Discussion and debate could be then expanded on this question. Moreover, teachers are
encouraged to share their life experience with the students.

**High School Curriculum**

For high school students, moral education takes the form of “Extracurricular
Activities” which will be embedded in school interest clubs. Morally relevant aspects of
personality and identity were considered as a way to understand the implication of moral.
Yet, one might worry that moral knowledge does not seem sufficient to impel moral
action, particularly when one’s morality conflicts with one’s impulse to act out of self-
interest. Thus, students will be obliged to embark in charitable activities, so that they can
be habituated to act morally. Students are required to complete 180 hours of ex-curricular
community service within three years of high school. This hour requirement is mandatory
for graduation. Every club in the school (e.g., basketball club, cheese club) must have one
service learning activities once in one or two month in order for the students to complete
the social service hours. Those volunteer experiences must be planned and led by
teachers or club leaders. Volunteer activities could involve prison visiting, elderly home
caring, street clearing. The service hours must be monitored by teachers and recorded on transcript.

**Hypotheses**

Moral education, when put into practice at all levels and variations, should serve students in their endeavors to discover and create a happy and meaningful life. Therefore, I will text my hypotheses based on both their moral reasoning and life satisfaction.

Hypotheses based on the curriculum are as follow,

1) Compared to their counterparts in control schools, students in schools adopting new moral curriculum, will have a higher level of morality development, as well as a higher level of life satisfaction.

2) The differences between experimental schools and control schools may be larger among higher graders.

Finally, the effectiveness of this curriculum will be compared between students in urban and suburban cities. From the survey conducted by the Horizon Research Group, rural area people have the highest life satisfaction and lower criminal rates in China, followed by town people and then cities (Yuan, 2011, October 15). Therefore, I expect that,

3) Students in urban cities will have higher gain from the moral curriculum than the students in suburban cities.

**Methods**

**Participants**

As a small two semesters pilot study, eight schools will be selected, four from urban areas (e.g., Beijing or Shanghai) and four from suburban areas (e.g., Tongzhou or
Jiading). Four schools (two in urban and two in suburban) will be randomly assigned to the experimental group, and the other four schools (two in urban and two in suburban) will serve as the control group. The experimental group will be introduced to the new moral curriculum, whereas the control group will continue with their original moral classes. For an ease of tracking, only schools having all primary, secondary and high school departments will be considered. Schools will be matched on teacher quality, utilities and student resources. All students in the selected schools will participate in the study. Informed consent will be obtained from the school administrators when negotiating the curriculum schedule.

**Measures**

_Defining Issues Test 2 (DIT2)_

DIT2 will be used in assessing moral decisions capacities. DIT2 is a modified version of DIT. DIT was devised by Rest (1979) as a multiple-choice alternative to Kohlberg’s Moral Judgment interview (MJI) which was hampered considerably by his labor-intensive and subjective coding system (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). It measures three moral judgment schemas: Personal Interests (making judgments based on the welfare of the individual), Maintaining Norms (making judgments based on law and order), and Postconventional (making judgments based on higher order principles and ideals (Rest et al., 1999). The presence of each of the three schemas in the respondent’s thinking by presenting moral dilemmas for which the participant rates and ranks possible considerations in making a decision for each dilemma. They are brief fragments of a justification that make sense to a participant who has the schema that undergirds the justification. For instance, one item that represents Personal Interests is “Isn’t it only
natural for a loving husband to care so much for his wife that he’d steal?” A respondent will rank this item as important if a “Personal Interests” schema underlies the respondent’s thinking about the moral dilemma. If the person has not been thinking in terms of the schema, or if it is not considered important, the participant will not give that item a high rating. The Minnesota Group has embarked upon a program of research to demonstrate the construct validity and reliability of the DIT and DIT2 (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999a, 1999b).

*Short Index of Self-Actualization Scale (SISA)*

SISA (Jones and Crandall, 1986) will be used to measure students’ self-actualization which is relevant to cognitive reasoning. This scale is modified on items from the widely accepted Personal Orientation Inventory (correlation, $r = .67$, $p < .001$). It also correlates with measures of self-esteem, rational behavior and beliefs, neuroticism, and extraversion. There are totally 15 items in this questionnaire, for example: “It’s better to be yourself than to be popular”, “I can express my feelings even when they may result in undesirable consequences”, and “I do not feel responsible to help anybody”. Students will need to indicate on a 6-point Likert Scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, the extent of their agreement on each item. Some items are revised to resist “faking good” responses. Higher score indicate a higher self-actualization.

*The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)*

Life satisfaction will be assessed using SWLS (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). The SWLS is a global measure of life satisfaction, consisting five strict forward question items. For instance, items are “the conditions of my life are excellent” and “I am satisfied with my life”. A 7-point Likert scale will be provided with numbers 1
to 7, with 1 indicate strongly disagree and 7 indicate strongly agree. The scores will be summed up, the lowest score is five and highest score is 35. The result can classify students into 7 stages of satisfaction (5-9: extremely dissatisfied, 10-14: dissatisfied, 15-19: slightly dissatisfied, 20: neutral, 21-25: slightly satisfied, 26-30: satisfied, 31-35: extremely satisfied). In this study, I will use the scale scores (as a continuous variable). SWLS can be administrated in a few minutes.

*Life Satisfaction Questionnaire (LISAT-9)*

Students’ life satisfaction will also be measured using the LISAT-9, a questionnaire aiming at several domains of life satisfaction (Fugl-Maeyer et al. 1991). The LISAT-9 contains 9 items, a single item assessing overall life satisfaction and 8 items that are domain-specific. 6-point Likert scale is provided, ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 6 (very satisfied). The average score of all items is often utilized. The various aspects of life satisfaction that LISAT-9 assesses are: self care management, contacts with friends, physical health, vocational, family life, partner relationships, financial and leisure situations, psychological health, and sex life. The sex life domain will not be included, as the aim of present study is teenagers.

**Procedure**

The emphasis of all curriculums is to be on self-relevant experiences that facilities fast understanding in children. My goal is to foster the growth of full moral agency, namely, a capacity for moral judgment, feeling, and action, so that children would know the right from wrong, intend, to do it, and are able to translate knowledge and feeling into effective moral behavior.
Trained psychologists will conducted some of the programs and monitor the processes throughout the program. Two weeks of intensive training on morality theories and techniques will be given to all psychologists before the start of the program. Regular meeting will be held once a week to share and exchange information such as teaching materials and student’s progress. Any improvement suggestions or insights that could contribute to the program will be open to discussion. Three well-trained psychologists will be assigned to one school and be responsible for conducting the moral curriculum to students and teaching techniques of moral practices to teachers.

In addition, the psychologists should teach teachers the basic moral education techniques and the use of moral language in classrooms. Class for teachers should be held once per month, in order to create a school climate of caring, loving, and responsibilities to others and societies. Psychologists are also responsible for administrating all the questionnaires (DIT, SISA, SWLS, and LISAT-9) to students at the end of each semester.

**Data Analysis Strategy**

The present study is a 2x2x4 factorial design, with area (urban and suburban) and school group (experimental schools and control schools) and grade level (Grade 1-3, Grade 4-6, secondary school, high school). The dependent variables are the moral cognitive reasoning tests (DIT and SISA) and the life satisfaction questionnaires (SWLS and LISAT-9). Dependent variables will be tested at the end of each grade level (Grade 1-3, Grade 4-6, secondary school, high school). Factorial ANOVA will be utilized on each of the dependent variables to test the research hypotheses. MANOVA will also be used to examine the dependent variable as a group, regarding the research hypotheses. Finally, multilevel modeling will be done to take into consideration of the dependency of
students from the same schools.

**Implications**

As a pilot study, the results of this proposed study will help shed lights on the appropriateness of such an integrated multi-level moral education curriculum, and its application in schools of China. The result will guide curriculum modification and future study where longitudinal design will be used and more schools will be involved. The long term goal of this research is to establish an effective moral education curriculum in China with the possibility that it can be recommended to schools across the country.

As the proposed education system is mainly curriculum based, rather than behavioral modification, the social learning perspective such as Mischel’s (1973, 977) role of person variables and Bandura’s (1977; 1982) behavioral modeling in moral education was not discussed in this proposal. However, prosocial behaviors involving self-control and the inhibition of self-indulgent behavior have their importance in moral character building (Perry & Bussey, 1984). Alternative studies should focus on schoolteacher’s education of behavioral modification, moral language and shaping techniques, in order to achieve a caring moral community. In addition, school mission as an important aspect in moral schools, should be consider in the modification of moral education interventions. Moreover, because of the big gap between rural areas and cities in terms of public service and living condition in China (Horizon Research Group, 2011), attention should be paid to psychological health and moral education of students who move from rural areas to cities. The responsibilities of school counselors, professional organizations, district stakeholders, and counselor educators to address ethical and legal concerns should also be specified. Carlo and Edwards (2007) also stressed that renewed
fervor in this field could be accomplished through the use of designs that will allow the study of moral change over time and the ability to draw more confident causal inferences (e.g., longitudinal designs, experimental manipulations).
References


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