

Title

Does Moral Education in East Asia Uniformly Promote Collectivism?:
Through An Analysis of Textbooks in Japan, South Korea, and China

Research Overview

Value education in Asia is often viewed as a single, unified concept, and Asia is also generally considered to be collectivist. This study analyzes the national curricula and textbooks of Japan, South Korea, and China to identify their commonalities and specificities, while also challenging the notion that Asia is collectivist.

Purpose of Study

This study aims at clarifying commonalities and specificities of moral education in three East Asian nations utilizing the theoretical lenses of individualism and collectivism.

Values education in Asia is often viewed as a single, unified concept. Furthermore, there is a discourse contrasting Western individualism with Asian collectivism, which also reflects a tendency to lump all of Asia together. This study casts doubt on such discourses from one perspective by examining the content of curricula and textbooks to determine whether the moral values addressed in moral education across east Asia—including individualistic and collectivist tendencies—are in fact shared.

Research Methods

The methodology proceeds in two stages. Firstly, this study compares and examines the keywording of the curricula under analysis to extract the moral values commonly addressed across the three nations. The subjects of analysis include Japan's Course of Study (specifically the 'Morality Period' implemented in 2019), South Korea's 2015 Revised Moral Education Curriculum, and China's Curriculum Standards for 'Ideological and Moral Education'.

Secondly, we review the textbooks covering these moral values and identify the commonalities and specificities among the three countries. This study analyses representative textbooks: Tokyo Shoseki (Japan), MiraeN (South Korea), and the People's Education Press (China), selected based on market share and existing academic literature. Regarding China, the analysis focused on the 'Morality and Rule of Law' textbook, which was developed in accordance with the

'Ideological and Moral Education' curriculum standards. The analytical framework of textbooks categorizes educational instructions and modes of thinking into 4 distinct types: individual precedence over the collective(A); independence from the collective or others(B); active involvement with the collective or others(C); collective precedence over the individual(D). We designate this classification, from A to D, as the 'Individualism-Collectivism Spectrum'.

Results and Discussion

First, regarding the common characteristics of moral education in East Asia, it became clear that more than half of the values addressed in the moral education programs of Japan, China, and South Korea are shared across all three countries. Furthermore, when analyzed along the individualism/collectivism spectrum, it was found that none of the three countries included statements asserting that the individual should take precedence over the group; instructions or ways of thinking unrelated to the group or others were observed for four values; and 12 moral values fell into the category of those where, although they involved the group or others, no instructions or ways of thinking were presented that prioritized the group over the individual. On the other hand, regarding moral values associated with the presentation of instructions or ways of thinking that prioritize the group over the individual—that is, pure (?) collectivism—significant differences were observed among the three countries. Specifically, in Japan, the two moral values that fell under this category were “Friendship” and “Justice”; in South Korea, they were “Compassion” and “Law-abiding spirit”; and in China, they were the six moral values of “Autonomy,” “Self-improvement,” “Identity Formation,” “Law-abiding spirit,” “Justice,” “Family,” and “Love for the nation.”

Furthermore, regarding the view that Asian education is collectively oriented, since no items corresponding to category A were found in any of the three countries, and values corresponding to category B were less than half (4 out of 13), it can certainly be said that relationships with people and groups are emphasized in these three countries. However, the fact that interpersonal relationships and group behavior are frequently addressed does not necessarily imply a promotion of collectivism. This is evident in Japan and South Korea, where values under category D were few (2 out of 13), while many values fell under category C. In contrast, in China, values in Category D accounted for approximately half of all values (6 out of 13).

Based on the above, we conclude that while East Asian moral education contains many shared values, there are differences in how these values are addressed; therefore, it is inappropriate to categorically view East Asian moral education as uniformly promoting collectivist education.

Keywords: Moral Education in East Asia, Convergence of values education, Individualism-Collectivism, Textbook Analysis