

# The Moral Education: Literature Review of Its Development from Past to Present

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## ABSTRACT

In a broad sense, moral education refers to all activities that purposefully and systematically exert influence on members of society in terms of politics, ideology, and morality. The purpose of this study is to expose Chinese moral education. This literature review synthesizes the paper on moral education from a historical view, pros and cons of moral development across K-12 and higher education. From a historical perspective, moral education in China falls heir to Confucianism ideology, synchronously reconciling the recent national development and situation. The changes are probed in K-12 and universities as moral education. The highlights and limitations in each period will be discussed. In conclusion, moral education in China is at the introductory period, as it intergrades the traditional value meanwhile transfers the new era of moral standards. The moral education in different periods schools from kindergartens to colleges are diverse in terms of moral purpose. Finally, this paper intends to provide the implications in policy, practice, and research regarding morality practice.

**Keywords:** moral education, moral development, K-12, higher education

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Morality is the fundamental root for the human being [1]. According to Hand, there are diverse and dramatic standards for different individuals and social groups [2]. Morality was defined as a subscription to the standards which was believed and consensus as justified. The relative practice targets morality is moral education, or short in ME. Broadly, Hand concludes that the central aim of moral education is that learners are fully committed to central moral standards and engaged by moral formation and inquiry [2]. In explicit content, the most consensus standard of moral education refers to training in the virtues of honesty, serving the people, loving the country, and collectivism. It is an aesthetic appreciation based on dialogic, life-practice, orientated activities, emotion, and care [3].

Morality and its relevant practice are essential in macro and micro, which specified as a nation, group and individual. Generally, from a macro perspective in

society and worldwide, the sense of justice from moral education encourages fairness and justice by the close relationship between morality and law and reciprocating [3, 4]. In detailed countries worldwide, moral education plays a role in a) governance and educational sustainability, b) cultural influence and c) social issues solving and practice. For instance, moral education was prioritized by the government and the ministry of education in countries as Germany, Singapore, Japan, etc. [5-8]. For the countries with a long history in culture, religions and philosophy positions, these nations highlight the relationship between moral education and ideology, philosophy positions and belief, such as Confucianism in ancient China, Graeco philosophy by Socrates, moral and spiritual education in India, etc. Meanwhile, morals contribute to solving the social issue as a doctrine in Peru, Poland, America, etc. [9, 10]. From a micro-perspective of individuals, morality has significant implications in shaping the characters and behaviors; The study of ethics helps students understand their moral and

professional responsibilities. Likewise, the learning outcomes are widely accepted by society as a person's quality and employment capability [11].

It is evident as above that moral education from ancient to present and connecting to the social and cultural. However, there is not systematically syntheses and comparison about moral education. Based on this, this essay will investigate the development of moral education in different periods and regions. The perspectives includes 1) cultural philosophy (e.g., Confucianism); 2) educational level from k-12 and higher education will be discussed.

## **2. MORAL EDUCATION FROM HISTORY TO PRESENT IN CHINA**

### ***2.1. Moral Education in Ancient China***

The main content of moral education in ancient China is Confucianism. The core idea of Confucianism was "benevolence," which was also the highest moral standard, moral code and moral realm [12]. And the development of moral education is a wave-like process because moral education serves politics [13]. The three periods (the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, the Western Han Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty and the Song Dynasty) have seen moral education sharply improved. In contrast, the development of moral education in some periods has been hindered.

The earliest record of moral education in China can be traced back to Shangshu, China's first ancient history book [14]. Researchers found that Confucius' Confucianism was spread in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods of China. Still, the ruler did not put it in an important position because of social changes and wars [15]. However, with the fall of the Qin Dynasty, people in this period indicated that ignoring moral education was a fundamental reason for the demise of the Qin Dynasty. Therefore, significant changes have occurred in Chinese moral education from the Western Han Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty. Ideology and morality have become an essential part of the country's training and assessment of talents [16]. It is worth mentioning that the Song Dynasty was also a glorious era of Confucian culture, which was reflected in the complete moral education system of the Song Dynasty Academy, including the goals, curriculum settings, and implementation systems of moral education [17].

### ***2.2. Moral Education in Modern China***

In 1980, Chinese society was in a state of "political openness, literary repression" [18]. The renewal of policy and practice in moral education in China has come about a rapid change in Chinese society due to the government's 'reform and opening up' policy since the end of the 1970s. The state of the People's Republic of China (PRC)

develops the concept of "regulated individualism" to understand how the PRC state copes with the tension between the newly acquired personal autonomy and the bottom line of socialist collectivism [19]. Primary school students are required to study the laws and regulations relating to their daily life. Secondary school students must learn laws pertaining to national identity, including the national Constitution, National Emblem Law, National Flag Law, and Regulations on Social Security. Students at higher educational institutions must pass compulsory courses about Marxism theories on legislation and Chinese legal politics [20].

## **3. MORAL EDUCATION FROM K-12 TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

### ***3.1. Moral Education in Kindergarten***

Literature mainly focuses on the following four points. Firstly, the significance of moral education in kindergarten. Researchers generally demonstrate that early childhood is a critical stage, and a kindergarten is a vital place for children to shape moral character [21]. Secondly, problems exist in kindergarten moral education, including the single site (only in the classroom); preaching method (it is difficult for children to understand); deficiency of time; lack of moral education work links (tracking feedback and family-kindergarten cooperation); lack of personalization for individuals [22]. To solve problems, researchers also propose the corresponding solutions such as integration of moral education, games, and curriculum; the use of hidden resources (environment, peer interactions and role models); training of teachers; cooperation between kindergarten and society (community education resources) [22]. Thirdly, kindergarten teachers' pedagogy in moral education tends to teach by example in life. Researchers criticized the traditional preaching and advocated instructing and influencing children by word and deed to standardize children's behavior in daily life [23]. Lastly, the early childhood curriculum of moral education is attributed to the field of society. Researchers suggest that based on Chinese early childhood curriculum is divided into five major fields (health, language, society, science, and art), moral education belongs to the social field, promoting the social development of young children (e.g., effectively reduce children's aggressive behavior) [24].

### ***3.2. Moral education in Primary and secondary school***

Teachers should not pay attention only to academic performance, but also places to improve the level of moral education and enhance the development of a student. Moral education is a vital part of whole-person education because it fosters students' positive values and attitudes [25]. A school's social work can play a role as a

social educator to help students develop positive social values, attitudes and behavior [26]. Schools should promote this in their curriculum, as well as extra-curricular activities. However, the resources allocated to primary schools are somewhat limited when compared with secondary schools.

Primary and secondary school moral education work has still not adapted itself to the new changes in the domestic and international situation, the new tasks of education reform and development, and the new circumstances surrounding ideological education work among youth.

### **3.3. Moral education in Higher education**

Higher education includes vocational colleges and academic universities. In China, it affords the final goal of morality training within the educational system. Overall, it is highly stressed and prioritized by the Chinese Ministry of Education. Moral education was subscribed to the standards of the Chinese situation, which was featured and justified to meet the goal of national development [27]. Although Confucianism (such as virtual, honest, love, etc.) was included in the higher education period, it weighs a small part than ideology (Marxism, Mao Zedong Thought, etc.) and law. For instance, from a political perspective, Chinese higher education's primary goal is to cultivate qualified students facing the changing world of 21st-century work. It is demonstrated that moral curriculum such as Global Situation and Policy, Military theoretical basis, Ideological and moral cultivation and legal basis meet the goal of contributing to work and society and fulfilling the civic responsibilities [28].

Based on the conduct of educational policy, in detail, moral education in universities depicts the characteristics as a) intensive and same learning content for students in different majors, b) lecture pedagogy as teacher-centered learning, and c) diverse assessment combines with authentic task and examination. Firstly, the content of moral education in universities and colleges is mainly concerned with seven subjects, which cross the virtue, ideology, history, current situation in global, law and policy. The seven subjects accord to the tremendous amount of content and endows the moral standard subscribes to the realistic national position of China [29]. Secondly, the pedagogy of moral education in higher education is the same as others, which adopts a teacher-centered lecture. In this pedagogy, no previews and critical discussion are required for students, but high concentration during the class, reviews and memorizing after class are essential [30]. The assessment stressed the authentic practice and examination, such as, a case study and report of immoral events, an essay and a report towards the situation or law documents, etc. The examination concludes with Open-book and closed-book

tests, which stress critical thinking, problem-solving, and memorizing.

## **4. CRITICISM OF MORAL EDUCATION FROM K-12 AND HIGHER EDUCATION**

### ***4.1. Criticism for Moral Education in Kindergarten***

Firstly, the policy on moral education in China has not been thoroughly implemented, and it is just a matter of mere formality. As mentioned above, moral education only occurs in the classroom instead of community and outdoor activities, and children have less time to obtain moral education [31]. Secondly, failing to formulate educational methods based on the characteristics of children's physical and mental development. Preaching is not conducive to children's understanding of the content of moral education, and different children have various levels of moral education development, and personal moral education plan is neglected [31]. Thirdly, lack of family-kindergarten cooperation, which leads to the absence of teacher feedback tracking and family-kindergarten interaction [32].

### ***4.2. Criticism for Moral Education in middle school***

#### ***4.2.1. Attention is paid only to intellectual education***

In China, middle school students are facing the stress of entering a higher school. In order to promote students' exam performance and also meet the expectations of schools and parents, students are more likely to gather the exam knowledge, and crammed for series of intense exams [25]. The purpose of middle school teaching is to enable students to master examination-oriented knowledge, rather than improving students' comprehensive quality and the cultivation of character, so the effect of moral education is minimal in many places and schools.

#### ***4.2.2. Teaching methods are outdated and lack of innovation***

The team of teachers generally shows a younger trend in recent years. However, many teachers still adopt the traditional teaching methods of popularization, moral education methods are unfocused, and ineffective [26]. Some teachers have defects in their ideological and moral quality and the requirements of teaching. It is difficult for students to grasp the profound wisdom behind the knowledge. Moral education work is not being adapted to young people's physical and psychological development, changes in social life, or the requirements of fully promoting quality education.

#### 4.2.3. Single dimension of teaching evaluation

The purpose of moral education is to enable students to form correct values and cultivate good behavior habits, so the corresponding evaluation methods cannot be determined entirely by grades [33]. It is impossible to see whether the students have achieved overall progress and ability improvement. This evaluation system is not perfect, and it is difficult to really improve students' awareness of self-morality.

#### 4.3. Criticism for moral education in higher schools

Higher moral education was criticized for its authentic practice and effect. Though the moral content, pedagogy and assessment are meticulously designed, the student did not digest and understand the nature of moral education [12]. Meanwhile, higher school moral education has distantly deviated from the goal in terms of cultivating the students for the 21st-century. The research indicated that higher school students concentrated on the grade point within moral education while neglecting morality's actual value [34]. In other words, students highly valued moral subjects in assessment and pedagogy than learning content. The next stage for students is social context, where moral education will not be provided as classes. Students insisted the moral standards provided in schools are correct and undeniable. Thus, it might be challenging to explore and practice the new morality when facing the changing and developing society [35]. From this perspective, higher education only provides full-scale learning content, while the inquiry of moral education is not mentioned.

### 5. CONCLUSION

In summary, since ancient times, we have witnessed the origin and development of moral education represented by Confucius in China. The advancement is the basis of the transformation and promotion of moral education in China, which has a profound moral impact on the Chinese people. Although substantial progress has been made in Chinese moral education history, there is space for developing moral education with Chinese characteristics, especially in terms of insufficient implementation of moral education policies, outdated moral education methods, lack of home-school cooperation, single teaching evaluation, ignoring the actual value of moral education, etc., all of which are expected to be formulated in the future the implementation plan to improve moral education with Chinese characteristics in a new era. This essay might be contributed to Chinese educational policy towards the morality practice, as the policymakers might conclude the moral standards not only from ideology and Confucianism, but also the 21st -Century natures. For practice from schooling, the teachers might value moral

education as a vital target in teaching. As well as adopting the creative, suitable and authentic pedagogical method in different periods. This paper also contributed the literature of morality development from a historical view and curriculum alignment within the Chinese context.

Further research might conduct from the worldwide scope of moral education and compare the moral education system from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the morality atmosphere in the social context also cultivates morality. Meanwhile, the empirical research of depth of moral development and actual practice requires attention in diverse schools.

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