



Incorporating Cultural Values Into Responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI) Principles From an Asian Perspective

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Abstract. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming our society in various ways. On the one hand, it offers encouraging opportunities for a brighter future for humanity. On the other hand, it poses an inherent risk to our existence. With the expeditious advancements in AI technology, it is essential to regulate its development to ensure responsible innovation and management. Despite the promulgation of several documents that propose a set of universal principles to address the issue of AI global governance, the authors argue that there is no such thing as a “universal code of AI ethics”. Instead, we urge for a human-centric approach that balances universalism and relativism. This approach recognizes the need to consider regional particularities and values, particularly in Asia, where there are distinctive cultural and ethical norms. The authors suggest that legislators design appropriate guidelines for Responsible AI in Asia that reflect these unique regional values.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, AI ethics, Asian values, Responsible AI.

1 Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping our society, presenting both promising prospects and inherent dangers. On the bright side, AI promises to transform industries like medical care, transportation, finance and banking, and manufacturing, increasing efficiency and productivity. AI-powered systems can enhance decision-making and foster innovation by swiftly and accurately analyzing vast data. They can also automate mundane tasks, liberating human resources for imaginative and strategic pursuits. Additionally, AI can improve our lives through personalized medicine, environmental conservation, and education (Maheshwari, 2023).

However, there are crucial concerns to address. Foremost among them is the risk of AI systems surpassing human capabilities, leading to job displacement and economic inequality (Di Battista, Grayling, & Hasselaar, 2023). Furthermore, autonomous AI systems’ accountability and potential biases raise questions. AI could perpetuate societal biases and discriminate against specific individuals or groups without proper regulation and design (Marr, 2022). Another substantial risk is the potential weaponization and malicious use of AI. For instance, the development and deployment of autonomous

weapons raise fears about the absence of human control and the dangers of AI in making life-or-death judgments (Crootof, 2022). Hence, in late May 2023, prominent AI industry leaders, academics, and celebrities advocated prioritizing reducing AI-related risks to global destruction. They emphasized that “Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war” (CAIS, 2023). Therefore, adopting responsible AI regulations is crucial to ensure the alignment of AI systems with human values and prevent significant global security threats.

Responsible AI (also known as “ethical AI” or “trustworthy AI”) refers to developing and deploying AI systems that address ethical concerns, notably responsibility, transparency, and the welfare of individuals and society (Mesameki, Blackmist, & Lgayhardt, 2022). It encompasses adopting practices and principles that ensure AI technologies are developed and utilized responsibly, considering potential societal impacts and concerns. Careful oversight and regulation are necessary to promote Responsible AI. The regulation of AI systems entails promulgating policies, laws, and regulations governing their development and deployment. These legal instruments strive to balance fostering innovation and safeguarding societal interests. Establishing ethical frameworks, ensuring safety and reliability, protecting privacy and data, promoting transparency and explainability, addressing socio-economic impacts, and fostering global cooperation are all critical aspects that regulations can address.

The European Union (EU) is making remarkable progress with the proposed AI Act by the European Commission on April 21, 2021. This regulation seeks to introduce a unified regulatory and legal framework for AI, covering all sectors except military applications. It will become the world’s first set of rules comprehensively addressing AI if approved (European Parliament, 2023). Furthermore, the proposed AI Act will reinforce the EU’s influence on shaping Responsible AI regulations worldwide (European Commission, 2021).

There are valid concerns regarding the widespread adoption of Responsible AI regulations when considering the global perspective. A significant meta-analysis conducted by ETH Zurich sheds light on this issue. The analysis examined approximately 1,000 codes that focused on AI ethical principles and uncovered a troubling fact: These codes are predominantly published by a limited number of individuals from a few countries. The study revealed that Western countries account for 63% of these codes. The complete absence of independent representation from African and South American countries in these published principles or guidelines is particularly concerning (Jobin, Ienca, & Vayena, 2019). This stark overrepresentation of Western countries and the lack of global inclusivity in addressing AI ethics indicates that economically advanced nations are shaping the discourse while disregarding crucial factors such as local knowledge, cultural diversity, and global fairness (Elias, 2022).

In this paper, the authors challenge the existence of a “universal code of AI ethics”. Instead, we advocate for a human-centric approach that balances universalism and relativism. Besides the introduction and conclusion, this paper consists of three main parts. In Part II, we delve into the crucial role of culture in shaping Responsible AI regulations. Cultural diversity contributes to ethical plurality, resulting in divergent ap-

proaches to Responsible AI worldwide. In Part III, we focus on Asian cultures, highlighting their distinctive characteristics and explaining their impact on AI systems' governance. In Part IV, we propose a culturally inclusive approach that embraces different ethical traditions. Building upon this foundation, we urge Asian legislators to design appropriate guidelines for Responsible AI in Asia that incorporate these unique regional values.

2 The Significance of Culture in Responsible AI

2.1 The Concept of Culture

Culture is a nuanced and intricate concept encompassing various dimensions and can be approached from different perspectives. Scholars and experts from different disciplines provide diverse definitions of culture, with an estimated count of over 400 definitions (Aquilon, 1997). One notable definition proposed by Hofstede describes culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2005). It emphasizes that culture comprises shared values, norms, beliefs, and ideas within a specific group, which are not necessarily codified like legislation but represent collective values (Elias, 2022).

In addition to Hofstede's definition, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) offers a more comprehensive understanding of culture. According to UNESCO, culture is “the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (UNESCO, 2001). This broader perspective recognizes the multifaceted nature of culture and emphasizes its influence on various aspects of human life and social dynamics.

In 2009, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed its perspective on culture in general comment No. 21 (CESCR, 2009). They took the view that culture encompasses:

ways of life, language, oral and written literature, music and song, non-verbal communication, religion or belief systems, rites and ceremonies, sport and games, methods of production or technology, natural and man-made environments, food, clothing and shelter and the arts, customs and traditions through which individuals, groups of individuals and communities express their humanity and the meaning they give to their existence, and build their world view representing their encounter with the external forces affecting their lives.

2.2 Cultural Diversity and Human Rights

Although no official definition of cultural rights exists, they can be understood as “rights in the field of culture” (Shaheed, 2010). Various UN human rights instruments make explicit or implicit references to cultural rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) acknowledged that:

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality. (Article 22)

and that:

Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. (Article 27(1)).

Furthermore, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) provides that:

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone: (a) To take part in cultural life; (b) To enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications; (c) To benefit from the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author. (Article 15(1))

The Special Rapporteur on cultural rights has clarified the scope of cultural rights (Bennoune, 2016). These rights protect various aspects, including:

- (a) human creativity in all its diversity and the conditions for it to be exercised, developed and made accessible;
- (b) the free choice, expression and development of identities, which include the right to choose not to be a part of particular collectives, as well as the right to exit a collective, and to take part on an equal basis in the process of defining it;
- (c) the rights of individuals and groups to participate, or not to participate, in the cultural life of their choice and to conduct their own cultural practices;
- (d) the right to interact and exchange, regardless of group affiliation and of frontiers;
- (e) the rights to enjoy and have access to the arts, to knowledge, including scientific knowledge, and to an individual's own cultural heritage, as well as that of others; and
- (f) the rights to participate in the interpretation, elaboration and development of cultural heritage and in the reformulation of cultural identities.

The Special Rapporteur on cultural rights has emphasized the universal nature of cultural rights, asserting that all individuals and peoples have culture, regardless of their categorization or geographic location. Cultures are dynamic constructs that continuously experience reinterpretation and should always be understood as plural (Shaheed, 2010). In other words, "culture" means cultures (Bennoune, 2016). However, culture must not be used to justify rights violations or discrimination. The Special Rapporteur reiterated that the universality of human rights and cultural diversity are mutually reinforcing and interconnected principles, not opposing factors (Bennoune, 2018).

2.3 Cultural Pluralism and Ethical Assessments of AI

The influence of culture on ethics holds significant importance. An individual's cultural background plays an essential contribution to creating their worldview and affecting their judgment of what is right and wrong. A recent study conducted an experiment using the trolley problem, incorporating economic incentives and real-life consequences, to compare moral behavior and judgments between British and Chinese participants. The findings revealed that cultural differences may contribute to variations in moral judgments and behavior (Gold, Colman, & Pulford, 2014). Therefore, ethics and culture must be viewed as interconnected strands of "social DNA", akin to the intertwined helices observed in the structure of DNA (Hagerty & Rubinov, 2019).

Hence, cultural pluralism must be considered when conducting ethical assessments of AI. It is imperative to acknowledge the multitude of ethical viewpoints as they represent the wealth of humanity. Attempting to universalize ethics in AI or any other domain is an unfeasible task since values and their hierarchical order are not universally applicable (Goffi, Colin, & Belouali, 2021). The study by ETH Zurich affirmed this notion, revealing that “no single ethical principle appeared to be common to the entire corpus of documents, although there is an emerging convergence” (Jobin et al., 2019).

3 Responsible AI From the Perspective of Asian Cultures

3.1 Asia’s Emphasis on Regionalism

In 1993, representatives from the ASEAN Member States, along with other Asian countries such as China and India, ratified the Bangkok Declaration on Human Rights (Bangkok Declaration, 1993). In this Declaration, Asian nations acknowledged that:

[...] while human rights are universal in nature, they must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds.

The Bangkok Declaration underlined some crucial concepts for Asian countries: self-determination, sovereignty, the non-interference principle, the right to development, and the interplay between economic and cultural rights and civil and political rights (Wu, 2016).

In 2012, the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD) highlighted another significant milestone in developing human rights protection in Asia. AHRD exhibits three distinctive characteristics: (1) it places greater emphasis on regional particularities rather than the universality of human rights; (2) it assesses the responsibilities of individuals against their rights; and (3) it expresses the concept of solidarity rights (Wu, 2016). Adopting the AHRD signifies progress from regionalism towards universalism, although the extent of this progress should be carefully evaluated (Wu, 2016). As stated in the AHRD:

All human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. All human rights and fundamental freedoms in this Declaration must be treated in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis. At the same time, the realization of human rights must be considered in the regional and national context bearing in mind different political, economic, legal, social, cultural, historical and religious backgrounds.

The significance of regional particularities is further emphasized in the AHRD. Consequently, while the adoption of the AHRD represents a step towards universalism, Asian countries firmly maintain the stance that universal human rights should always be situated within the framework of regional particularities (Wu, 2016).

3.2 The Asian Values Debate

The Bangkok Declaration on Human Rights affirmed the commitment of several Asian countries to the principles outlined in the United Nations Charter and the UDHR. It

focused on fundamental themes such as sovereignty, self-determination, and non-interference in civil and political rights (Myers, 2011). Lee Kuan Yew, who served as the Prime Minister of Singapore from 1959 to 1990, advocated for this approach. He argued that Asian societies possessed distinct values compared to Western societies, referring to these as “Asian values”. Lee believed embracing these values could foster economic growth, promote social harmony, and prevent social problems. While he highlighted the impact of the Confucian tradition on these values, he also recognized them in other Asian traditions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam (Myers, 2011). The pillars of “Asian values” encompassed (1) a preference for social harmony, (2) concern for socio-economic prosperity and collective well-being, (3) loyalty and respect towards figures of authority, and (4) a preference for collectivism and communitarianism (Bangkok Declaration, 1993).

However, critics have challenged the discourse on Asian values, arguing that it depends on over-simplistic perceptions of Asian cultures. Remarkably, Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate in economics, challenged Lee’s hypothesis on both empirical and qualitative grounds (Sen, 1999). The Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-1998 seemed to provide some evidence supporting their arguments (Myers, 2011).

So, do Asian values genuinely exist? The response is a combination of yes and no. Yes, because Asians have distinctive traditions and ways of life that differ from those of Westerners. These practices both reflect and reinforce their cultural values and norms. Like any other region, Asians possess unique cultural norms, rituals, and traditions that have evolved over their histories. In this sense, acknowledging Asian values as cultural traits that set Asians apart from non-Asians is not an ideological stance. However, it is also essential to recognize that some Asian values may be imaginary. The reality may lie between the two extremes (Kim, 2010). As Donald Emmerson observed:

The extreme understanding of “Asian values” as a unique set of preferences found only in Asia is untenable. But Asians do have some values, and certain Asians (and Westerners) have identified certain values as characteristically Asian. These observations imply a strategy for shifting constructively from the extremes of the “Asian values” debate toward the center by trying to determine what values Asians do hold and ascribe to one another (Emmerson, 1995).

3.3 The Distinctive Asian Approach to Responsible AI

We select the EU as a representative of Western societies and Japan as a representative of Asian countries for two reasons. First, they have cultivated well-established robot cultures that can be traced back to the aftermath of World War II (Jecker & Nakazawa, 2022). These historical contexts have shaped their unique perspectives on robotics and AI. Second, the EU and Japan have effectively translated their cultural values into tangible policies governing the development and deployment of AI systems.

The EU approach. The concept that robots represent a danger to humanity has been a popular subject in Western literature and movies since the post-World War II era. This perception of chaos and destruction continues to manifest in recent works from the

West (Jecker & Nakazawa, 2022). When contemporary Western philosophers contemplate robots, their perspectives reflect concerns portrayed in media and align with the broader Judeo-Christian worldview that permeates Western society. According to this perspective, robots are viewed as tools to accomplish human objectives, perpetuating the idea that human-machine relationships are always instrumental toward human ends (Jecker & Nakazawa, 2022). For instance, Microsoft founder Bill Gates envisioned a future where robots perform many chores to reduce human responsibilities. In his vision, robots do not assume roles as partners, companions, or friends in human social interactions; they exist solely as objects serving human masters (Gates, 2007).

Consequently, the proposed AI Act by the EU adopts a risk-based approach. It outlines obligations for AI providers and users based on the potential risks associated with the AI systems. AI systems that pose an unacceptable risk to people's safety would be strictly prohibited. They include systems employing subliminal or manipulative techniques, exploiting vulnerabilities, or used for social scoring. The Act also sets rigorous constraints on "high-risk" AI applications that have the potential to cause serious harm to people's health, safety, fundamental rights, or the environment (European Parliament, 2023).

Additionally, the Act mandates transparency requirements for AI systems. For example, systems like ChatGPT must disclose that their content is AI-generated, differentiate between deep-fake and authentic images, and implement safeguards against generating illegal content. Moreover, detailed summaries of the copyrighted data used to train these AI systems must be publicly available. AI systems that entail minimal or no risk primarily operate outside the purview of these regulations (Ziady, 2023).

The Japanese approach. Japan boasts a distinct robot culture that emerged in the aftermath of World War II, rooted in the realm of popular manga and anime. This cultural perception of robots as a force for good and protectors of society continues to resonate in Japanese manga and anime produced in the post-World War II era (Jecker & Nakazawa, 2022).

Beyond the influence of popular culture, Japan's optimistic stance toward robots is shaped by socio-economic factors. As the world's oldest society, Japan faces the highest old-age dependency ratio and grapples with impending labor shortages (Richter, 2023). Consequently, robots are viewed as integral to resolving Japan's labor crisis by filling gaps in the paid workforce (Schneider, Hong, & Le, 2018). Furthermore, Japanese society sees robots and AI as allies in addressing other socio-economic challenges, including mitigating climate change through renewable energy and improving infrastructure accessibility for remote populations (Government of Japan, 2016). In these regards, robots are regarded as valuable partners in tackling social issues.

The Japanese government's vision, encapsulated in the "Society 5.0" blueprint, further underscores the positive outlook on robots. In 2016, Japan introduced the Fifth Science and Technology Basic Plan, defining Society 5.0 as a human-centered society that harmonizes economic progress with resolving societal problems through a highly integrated cyberspace and physical space system. According to this vision, Society 5.0 envisions a state where people, things, and systems are interconnected in cyberspace, and the optimal outcomes achieved by AI, surpassing human capabilities, are fed back

into the physical realm. This process is believed to generate new value for industry and society. While Society 5.0 is a blueprint tailored to Japanese society, it is concurrently designed to align with global objectives, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (Government of Japan, 2016).

In 2018, Japan launched the “Moonshot Research & Development Program” to realize a technologically integrated society through “disruptive innovations” that surpass existing technologies in their approach to harmonious coexistence between humans and robots. This program encompasses seven moonshot goals, including Moonshot Goal 3, which aims to achieve AI robots that autonomously learn, adapt to their surroundings, evolve in intelligence, and collaborate alongside human beings by 2050. Grounded in the principles of coevolution and self-organization, Japan envisions three key outcomes by 2050: (1) AI robots capable of independent judgment and action in environments where human intervention is challenging; (2) an automated AI robot system that strives to uncover groundbreaking scientific principles and solutions by engaging in thought and action within the natural sciences field; and (3) AI robots that provide humans with a sense of comfort, possess physical abilities equal to or surpassing those of humans, and thrive harmoniously within the human way of life (Government of Japan, 2018).

Two different but complementary approaches. Considering the analyses above, the EU adopts a risk-based approach that primarily focuses on the potential negative aspects of AI systems. At the same time, Japan takes an optimistic position that seeks coevolution and a harmonious relationship between humans and AI robots. These approaches are two complementary facets of the same issue. When building a sustainable future for responsible innovation and management, we cannot afford to neglect either side. By way of illustration, the EU's precautionary stance safeguards Japan's technological enthusiasm by considering worst-case scenarios. Conversely, Japan's technological optimism reminds us that certain risks are worth taking because they can lead to more prosperous lives (Jecker & Nakazawa, 2022). Consequently, incorporating EU and Japanese values into international ethics guidance can bring us closer to realizing a global framework for Responsible AI.

4 Toward a Culturally Inclusive Approach for Responsible AI

In our globalized world, the ethical challenges posed by AI and robotics demand solutions that transcend national boundaries and regional perspectives. It is crucial to avoid viewing Western ethics as a foundation to which non-Western values are merely peripheral additions. Instead, a more comprehensive exploration of diverse ethical and cultural values can foster a global ethical framework (Jecker & Nakazawa, 2022). We can cultivate trust and prevent misunderstandings by embracing a broader spectrum of values. It is worth noting that the lack of understanding, rather than disagreement, often serves as the primary source of distrust between Western and Eastern cultures in AI ethics (ÓhÉigeartaigh, Whittlestone, Liu, Zeng, & Liu, 2020).

To achieve a more internationally inclusive approach to ethical guidelines, we should strive to combine both Western and Eastern values. This inclusive approach promises a more nuanced understanding and consideration of practical ethical challenges. Recognizing the strategic role of caution and optimism is essential, as they can serve as counterweights to one another (Jecker & Nakazawa, 2022).

For two reasons, cross-cultural cooperation is still possible, even with fundamental differences. Firstly, cooperation does not require complete agreement on principles and standards for all aspects of AI. Secondly, agreements on practical issues are feasible despite disagreements regarding abstract values or principles (ÓhÉigearthaigh et al., 2020).

Remarkably, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) has raised its serious concerns over the dominance of Western ethical traditions in shaping Responsible AI regulations. The IEEE emphasizes that the full benefits of autonomous and intelligent systems can only be realized if they align with society's defined values and ethical principles. They highlight the urgent need to expand the scope of traditional ethics, which they term "responsible innovation" (RI), beyond Western foundations. The IEEE document includes insights from non-Western ethical traditions such as Classical Buddhism, African Ubuntu, and Japanese Shinto (Chatila, Firth-Butterfield, & Havens, 2018). We welcome such an inclusive approach, acknowledging the value of incorporating diverse cultural perspectives.

5 Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that the notion of a "universal code of AI ethics" is illusory. We must acknowledge and appreciate cultural diversity as a heritage of humanity. Since cultural differences can significantly shape perspectives on what is deemed acceptable, cultural values provide the foundation for ethical evaluations of AI. Therefore, it is imperative to incorporate cultural values into Responsible AI. We strongly advocate for legislators at the national and regional levels to integrate their respective cultural values into policies and regulations governing Responsible AI, particularly in Asia, where unique cultural and ethical norms exist. At the global level, we emphasize the need for inclusive discussions on Responsible AI that encompass diverse perspectives from all regions worldwide. The future of our technological landscape depends on recognizing and integrating cultural pluralism into responsible innovation and management, guiding us toward a sustainable future.

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