

Reasoning about Moral Obligations and Interpersonal Responsibilities in Different Cultural Contexts

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Abstract

The focus of our research is the development of the understanding of moral obligations and interpersonal responsibilities in a cross-cultural context. Friendship and parent–child relations were selected as two types of relationships which are especially important in the process of development and socialization in which the meaning of obligations and responsibilities is learned. The socio-cultural contexts of a Western culture (Iceland) and an Asian culture (mainland China) represent two different cultural settings for development and socialization of the understanding of obligations and responsibilities in relationships. A developmental framework in which persons from both cultures are compared at different ages seems particularly well suited to pursue the question whether similarities or differences between persons from the two cultures occur and whether they are stable or vary in the time period from childhood to adolescence. In the following we shall first discuss theoretical aspects of this research and then outline some of the questions guiding the empirical research.

1. Moral obligations and interpersonal responsibilities

Moral obligations and interpersonal responsibilities have been increasingly differentiated both in the philosophical and in the psychological literature. Moral obligations in the Kantian tradition define duties or obligatory actions that we owe to everybody under all circumstances. They include, for example, the obligation to keep a promise or to be veridical. These obligations have been subsumed under the principle of justice and fairness both in philosophical and in psychological research (e.g., Kohlberg, 1984; Rawls, 1971). On the other hand, expectations and responsibilities in interpersonal relationships refer to concerns about the well being of another person. In general—at least in the Western cultural context—they define actions that are less obligatory, that we do not owe to everybody equally, and which depend more on the circumstances of the situation. In philosophy and psychology these responsibilities have been addressed under the topics of sympathy and empathy, prosocial or altruistic concerns and the principle of beneficence or care (e.g., Blum, 1980; Eisenberg, 1982; Gilligan, 1982; Hoffman, 1984, 2000). In psychology and in philosophy it has come to be increasingly accepted that both justice and care or solidarity are necessary components of morality (Habermas, 1990).

Research in moral development has been differentially concerned with the two principles of justice and care. Research in the Kohlberg-tradition has focused primarily on the principle of justice (Kohlberg, 1984). The principle of care has been the focus of a program established by Gilligan (1982) as a criticism of Kohlberg's justice oriented approach, but it has also been in the focus of research on empathy and altruism (Eisenberg, 1982; Hoffman, 1984). The principles of justice and care have been related differentially to cognition and feelings, and they have been addressed in empirical research with different methodologies and assessment strategies. In moral dilemmas that were presented to persons in the Kohlberg-oriented justice-tradition predetermined moral obligations or rights conflict with each other. In the famous Heinz dilemma, where a husband has to consider whether he ought to steal a medicine in order to save his wife's life, the right to life conflicts with property rights. In the care-oriented Gilligan-tradition as well as in the context of research on empathy and altruism moral obligations or interpersonal responsibilities conflict with selfish needs. Moreover, dilemmas in the Kohlberg-tradition were designed to address conflicts outside the reality of everyday life in order to assess "moral competence." In the care-tradition dilemmas were designed to address concerns of everyday life and to establish

a stronger identification of the persons with the protagonist in a dilemma. As a consequence of this approach, moral reasoning relative to issues of empathy and care has been conceptualized as more dependent on the context of the particular situation than research concerning the principle of justice. Further, in this tradition interpersonal feelings such as sympathy and empathy and moral feelings such as guilt or shame claimed attention as topics of research.

In contradistinction to this polarization of the two moral principles it has also become increasingly clear that moral reasoning about issues of justice and care cannot be separated so neatly. Justice issues are not merely the objects of purely cognitive reasoning processes, but may arouse specific feelings as in the case of a justice feelings or motives or a feeling of moral outrage when justice is failed (Montada, 1993). Empathy, on the other hand, requires more than affect when moral choices about conflicting claims are made (Hoffman, 2000). Moller-Okin (1989) has called attention to the fact that Rawls (1971) in his theory of justice takes issues of care in family relationships to be the basic conditions for the development of a sense of justice, comprising cognition and feelings. In many of Kohlberg's dilemmas that were designed to assess justice reasoning such as the dilemma of Heinz und his dying wife, issues of care clearly play an important role. In our own research (Keller, 1996; Keller & Edelstein, 1990; Keller & Reuss, 1984) we have argued that morality in close relationships requires taking into account both the principle of justice and the principle of care. In close relationships with parents and peers children learn the meaning of moral obligations like promise keeping and truth telling, and of interpersonal responsibilities, such as concerns with the wellbeing of another person with whom the self stands in an affectively close relationship. Moreover, both in contexts of justice and care moral decision making is determined by performance conditions resulting from particular aspects of the situation and/or the self which the person considers in order to find a solution (Edelstein & Noam, 1982). Persons in their everyday life do not consider moral obligations as strictly obligatory under all circumstances, but they take the conditions of the situation into account when weighing different claims against each other. In situations of conflicting claims involving the self (if only in terms of identifying with a protagonist in a hypothetical dilemma situated in a close relationships) the person interprets the meaning of the situation depending on the particularities of the situation, including both self-interest and obligations or responsibilities towards others. Persons vary in their sensitivity for the moral aspects of a conflict situation, both developmentally and differentially (Rest, 1983). When interpreting the meaning of a situation they may not spontaneously take into account the moral aspects of a situation, but may be concerned with other--selfish or pragmatic--aspects. They may be sensitive to different types of obligations and responsibilities and pragmatic-egoistic concerns of the self may achieve priority over obligations and responsibilities in situations in which moral and selfish concerns are in conflict (Nisan, 1984, 2004). Such a broader interpretive framework directs attention from moral competence--the focus of the Kohlberg tradition--to moral motivation (Nunner-Winkler, 1993) and the moral self (Blasi, 1993) in more recent approaches to moral development (see Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004, for an overview). We raise the question about the issues or concerns that persons take into account in their moral decision making in view of individual development, context and culture.

2. The development of moral obligations and interpersonal responsibilities

From a developmental perspective the criteria defining moral stages represent different interpersonal and moral concerns (Kohlberg, 1984). According to Kohlberg's definition of the pre-conventional moral stages in the context of justice-reasoning at the first stage, the person's evaluation of what is right is motivated by obedience to rules and fear of sanctions of authorities in the case of violation of rules. At the second stage interests of the self as well as pragmatic but self-oriented concerns for others are dominant concerns. Only at Stage 3 of conventional moral reasoning empathy and care for others become moral concerns. This theoretical position has given rise to considerable criticism (see Keller, 1996; Keller, Eckensberger, & von Rosen, 1989). Research on empathy and altruism (Eisenberg, 1982; Hoffman, 2000) has provided evidence that empathy and sympathy play a role in young children's moral reasoning. But Eisenberg's research also documented that self-oriented, hedonistic reasoning is present in young children's moral reasoning and decreases in the course of development, when the person becomes increasingly aware of interpersonal concerns, and gives priority to them in moral decision making. Similarly, Gilligan (1982) in her first model of a developmental sequence of care reasoning assumed the predominance of egoistic concerns especially at the first stage. Research with younger children documented that

young children understand the validity of moral rules independent of authority, sanctions or self-interest (Keller & Edelstein, 1993; Nucci, this volume; Turiel, 1983). On the other hand, it has been shown that young children, even in case of genuine knowledge about obligations and responsibilities, may be guided by self-interest in their decision making in a morally relevant situation (Gerson & Damon, 1978) and in the attribution of feelings in case of rule violation serving the needs of the self (Keller, Lourenço, Malti, & Saalbach, 2003; Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988). The experience of necessity to act according to one's moral knowledge and to establish consistency between moral judgment and action clearly has a developmental component (Blasi, 1983, 1993; Keller & Edelstein, 1993; Kohlberg & Candee, 1984)--at least in the Western cultural context (Keller, 2004). In general, these findings show that, developmentally, moral reasoning and decision-making is a multifaceted phenomenon, and that young children have various types of concerns when making choices in morally relevant conflicts of everyday life. Thus, the type of situation or the context must be taken into account as an important factor. Developmentally, younger children may be biased in a situation either towards the concerns of self or of others, whether it be the demands of authorities or empathic concerns, because they cannot yet balance different concerns adequately. However, it may also depend on the situation and on the culture on which aspects of the situation the person will spontaneously center, or which aspects will achieve predominance in decision making. Therefore, development, context and culture must be taken into account in the process of moral decision-making.

3. Obligations and responsibilities in close relationships: the role of context

In the research presented here we pursue the development of moral obligations and interpersonal responsibilities in close relationships both in a relationship of equality, such as friendship, and in a relationship of inequality, such as the parent-child relationship. Close relationships are particularly suited to understand the development of moral sensitivity and the development of a moral self (Keller, 1996; Keller & Edelstein, 1993). The development of interpersonal sensitivity and the moral self occur in situations of affective bonding to significant others. Parents and peers are particularly important persons in this developmental process. In the cognitive-developmental tradition relationships with parents and with peers have been held to represent prototypical relationships of inequality and equality. Piaget (1932/1965) assumed that moral autonomy emerges in peer relationships which are characterized by reciprocity and mutuality. These situations are distinct from the parent-child relationships that are characterized by asymmetry and lead to a heteronomous morality. Based on this assumption, researchers in developmental psychology have postulated that moral development is advanced in peer relationships compared to authority relationships, and that morality in the peer context is of a different quality than in the authority context of parent-child relationships (Youniss & Damon, 1992). Whereas obedience and fear of sanctions have been seen as predominant moral concerns in unilateral parent-child relationships, affective solidarity and empathy were considered predominant concerns in peer relationships, specifically in close friendship. It is more or less implied in these assumptions that the two principles of fairness and care are differentially tied to friendship and parent-child relationships. The domain of friendship has been seen as particularly well suited to explore the moral meaning of close symmetrical relationships (Bukowski & Sippola, 1996; Keller & Edelstein, 1990). Friendship implies solicitude for the good of the friend, and gives rise to mutual expectations about how one ought to act and feel in order to establish and maintain closeness. However, recent research has shown that children's moral reasoning about parent-child relationships cannot be characterized exclusively by concerns of obedience and fear of sanctions, but need to take into consideration aspects of emotional solidarity which are also characteristic of close friendship (Grundmann & Keller, 1999a; Keller, 1996; Keller et al., 1989; Neuhäuser, 1993). Interestingly, these findings agree with Piaget's, who claimed that the morality of the right and the morality of the good both originate in parent-child relationships (see Krettenauer, 1998). We therefore conclude that both the principle of fairness and the principle of care are important aspects of morality in close relationships, including both parent-child relationships and friendship. Piaget's idea of the morality of the good, however, was lost in Kohlberg's conception of the stages of pre-conventional morality.

From a developmental perspective it has been shown for Western societies that relationships change in the course of development from childhood to adolescence, and that the moral understanding of relationships is a developmental achievement. In parent child relationships adolescence is a phase in which equality is established or at least striven for by adolescents. Rights and responsibilities as well as personal concerns are negotiated to a

greater extent than in earlier phases of development (Grundmann & Keller, 1999b). Adolescence is also an important phase in friendship relations. According to Selman's (1980) stage model of friendship understanding the young child at the first developmental level is seen as centered on self's concerns. At the second level issues of promise keeping and mutual support are crucial in a pragmatic way. As Selman's research and that of others show, concepts such as trust, loyalty and intimacy in friendship are developmentally later achievements that emerge at the third level in adolescence (Keller & Wood, 1989). In this period the self is closely embedded in the friendship relationship (Keller, 2004).

From a socialization perspective it has been argued that Piaget's descriptions of peer-relationships and parent-child relationships represent ideal types. In the reality of interaction, peer-relationships may be more or less dominated by power structures and characterized by different aspects of constraint (Krappmann, 1993). Parent-child relationships, on the other hand, may differ with regard to unilateral constraint and the amount of symmetry that is permitted in the negotiation of rules. First, modern or postmodern parent-child relationships differ from the structure of the Genevan family that Piaget knew in the thirties of the past century. Second, empirical socialization research has shown that parent-child relationships can be distinguished according to how much equality they establish, and how much negotiation of rules they permit in morally relevant situations of conflicting claims. This possibility of discourse and negotiation of rules has been related to the moral development of the child. Finally, the structure of relationships is different in different cultures, as we will discuss in the following.

4. Obligations and responsibilities in close relationships in a cross-cultural perspective

The development of obligations and responsibilities in close relationships has rarely been studied in a cross-cultural perspective. First, research has focused more on adolescents and adults than on younger children. Second, especially in the Kohlberg tradition, the focus has been more on moral norms in hierarchically structured relationships than on the development of responsibilities in relationships of equality such as friendship. Cross-cultural research has shown that cultures give different priorities to justice-related concerns and to interpersonal responsibilities. Comparing Asian and Western cultures, Bersoff and Miller (1993; Miller, this volume) showed that persons from India were more concerned with issues of care and gave greater priority to interpersonal responsibilities than US-American persons. In contrast, persons from the United States were more concerned with moral rules and issues of justice, and gave priority to formal moral obligations. Thus, Indians judged helping to be obligatory independent of the type of relationship, while US-Americans judged helping friends to be more obligatory than helping strangers. Miller suggests that these differences arise from different moral codes where Indians give priority to social duties, while US-Americans give priority to individual rights and personal choice. Similarly, Shweder, Mahapatra and Miller (1987) claim that Indians perceive interpersonal responsibilities as duties, while US-Americans see them as more voluntary.

Cross-cultural findings in the Kohlberg-oriented tradition revealed that the scoring criteria for stages of development derived in the framework of justice reasoning were too narrow to capture the specifics of moral reasoning of persons from different cultures (Boyes & Walker, 1988; Eckensberger & Zimba, 1997). However, this deficit may not only result from Kohlberg's western-biased theoretical framework but also from the fact that the scoring manual for arguments (Colby et al., 1987) was exclusively based on US-Americans. Persons from Asian cultures such as China and India frequently mentioned issues of interpersonal harmony, concern for others, welfare and mutual benevolence and harmony with nature which were not adequately captured through the criterion judgments in Kohlberg's scoring manual (e.g., Dien, 1982; Hwang, 1986). The arguments are similar to aspects of interpersonal responsibility described by Miller and Shweder for Indian persons.

Miller (1991) has discussed the findings of her research with regard to the debate about gender-specific morality, in which it was claimed that men and women are differentially inclined towards justice or care. She criticized Gilligan's assumptions of a female morality of care because it implies that persons of the same sex from different cultures are more similar in their moral reasoning than are persons within a culture. Given the differences between cultures and the weak effects of gender that have been found within cultures (Walker, 1991), Gilligan's thesis does not appear plausible. Rather, cultural context seems to contribute significantly to moral learning. Cultural differences between Western and Asian cultures have been explained as due to a distinction between individualistic and collectivistic orientations (Triandis, 1990). According to this distinction it is

assumed that persons in Western cultures are taught to value independence and individualism, whereas in Asian cultures social responsibility towards the group is strongly emphasized (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). More recently, this distinction has been critically debated and various researchers have emphasized that cultures cannot be differentiated along one dimension (Turiel, 1998, this volume), because cultures are complex systems which contain features of both individualism and collectivism. This is in particular true for modernized societies.

In spite of these critical warnings and the finding that the Chinese culture does not seem to represent a typically collectivist society according to the Triandis-scale (Bond, 1996) it seems that relationship values are emphasized more strongly in the process of socialization in China than in the West. Benevolence and concern for the well being of other members of the community represent moral values both in the Confucian and in the Marxist traditions (Bond, 1996). Parent-child relationships in Western and Asian societies appear to differ due to the functional requirements of life and cultural tradition. Iceland is a highly modernized capitalistic society, but at the same time it is family and child oriented (Tomasson, 1980). As parents tend to work hard, children develop less controlled by adults. Children, and in particular adolescents, are conspicuously peer-oriented. Historically, living conditions on the stray settlement sheep raising farms of rural Iceland established a high degree of individualism and equality between the generations due to the functional requirements of work in the farm (Edelstein, 1983). In China, parent-child relationships represent a clear example of relationships of inequality. Family relationships are traditional and a general pattern of obedience and respect of the child for the parents is maintained throughout life. This is expressed in the concept of filial piety that is the predominant norm in China. Ho (1996) argued that authoritarian moralism is a central characteristic of the Chinese pattern of socialization guided by filial piety. The emphasis is on obedience, indebtedness to parents and on moral correctness, not on self-fulfillment or psychological sensitivity. But he also argued that the tradition of filial piety is in decline. In his opinion this cultural change--which today seems to be even stronger than at the time of our research---indicates a radical change in the definition of intergenerational relationships that may lead to a liberalization of traditional constraints and enhance the development of individualism.

Rather little is known about whether the meaning of friendship is the same across cultures (Krappmann, 1996). From Western cultures we know that close friendship is important in the socialization process, and that adolescence is the time where friendship relationships are particularly significant. According to Goodwin and Tang (1996), friendship is the only relationship of possible equality in the Confucian system of relationships in China. On the other hand, Berndt (1993; Berndt & Zook, 1993) speculated that the pattern of intimate friendship that is so characteristic of Western societies may have been--or perhaps still is-- less characteristic in Communist China because of the strength of family ties and a stronger emphasis on peer relations in general rather than on intimate friendship. Whereas the Chinese seem to incorporate group structure as part of their self-definition (as has also been described for the Japanese culture), it is an open question whether close friendship has the same developmental significance for Chinese adolescents, as is the case for adolescents in Western cultures.

5. Moral reasoning about a friendship and a parent-child dilemma: an empirical study

In the research presented below we examine the question how children and adolescents from two different cultural contexts reason about moral obligations and interpersonal responsibilities in a morally relevant conflict in a parent-child and a friendship relationship. The research originates from a study that assessed the development of socio-moral reasoning longitudinally from childhood to adolescence and young adulthood in Iceland (see Edelstein, Keller, & Schröder, 1990; Keller, 1996). In this study participants were interviewed about their general understanding of the moral norms of promise keeping and of close relationships, i.e., friendship and parent-child relationship. Furthermore, they had to reason about a hypothetical friendship dilemma as well as a parent-child dilemma.

The Icelandic study included 121 participants from the city of Reykjavik who were successively tested at the ages of 7, 9, 12 and 15 (and about half of the sample at the age of 19) years. The sample was stratified according to social class and gender. Additionally, persons from three rural communities in Iceland were tested longitudinally at the same ages until the age of 15 years (see Edelstein et al., 1990, for a detailed description). The participants of the Chinese study were assessed cross-sectionally, 80 persons from Beijing at age 7 years and 90 persons at each of the ages 9, 12 and 15 years. Parts of this sample were followed up longitudinally. Participants were about equally distributed according to gender and three different school types representing

different social classes (workers, employees, and members of the elite, mainly government employed academics). Only the cross-sectional data are analyzed here.

The two conflicts presented to participants from both cultures were pre-tested in order to establish cultural validity. Slight variations were introduced in the task formulations to accommodate the situation to specific understandings of age groups and cultures. Both the friendship and the parent-child dilemma proved culturally valid. In spite of the predominant single child family, Chinese persons had no trouble with the sibling relationship in the parent-child dilemma. If necessary, a cousin relationship was substituted. The interviewers were also permitted to reformulate, elaborate or ask additional questions for clarification.

In the friendship dilemma, which was adapted from Selman (1980; Keller, 1984, 1996), a protagonist had to choose between keeping a promise to the best friend or accepting an interesting invitation from another child who was new in class. For males and females the dilemma was presented as a conflict between persons of the same gender. Some aspects made the situation psychologically more complicated, e.g., that the meeting with the friend is on their special day, that the old friend appears not to like the new child, and that he or she wants to talk about something that is important for him. The conflict therefore can be interpreted in terms of different concerns: the hedonistic concern related to the interesting offers made by the friend or the new child; the moral obligation to keep the promise or the arrangement with the friend; interpersonal responsibilities of care resulting from the long-term friendship and the needs and feelings of the close friend; finally the responsibilities towards the third child who is alone.

The participants' understanding of these concerns was explored in the course of a comprehensive interview about the perspectives of the protagonist and the other persons involved (Keller, 1996). The analyses presented here focus on practical and moral choice (is-ought) and reasons for these choices.

In the parent-child dilemma (an adaptation from Kohlberg's Judy dilemma, see Colby et al., 1987; Keller et al., 1989) a mother has promised her daughter that she can spend the money she has earned herself or received as a present on a movie or a concert. At the last minute the mother claims the money from the daughter because it is needed to buy things for school. The daughter lies about the amount of money and goes to the movie or concert--with the knowledge of her sister. The dilemma focuses on the sister who has to decide whether she should tell her mother the truth or be silent about it when the mother asks her about the sister's whereabouts. Again, the conflict contains different concerns. Beyond the issues of parental authority and the contractual norm of promise keeping which were emphasized by Colby and Kohlberg (1987) the moral norm of veridicality--not to lie to the mother--and interpersonal responsibilities such as care or loyalty to the sister are important concerns in the situation. Since the parent-child dilemma is defined by an authority conflict in which gender plays no constitutive role; it was decided to use the classical Kohlberg dilemma involving females only. Furthermore, the interview strategy, in line with the Kohlberg tradition, focused exclusively on the moral judgment and the reasons supporting it. In addition, however, respondents were asked for justifications that might support an alternative moral judgment of a fictitious third person. In line with this tradition the family dilemma was (unfortunately) tested only in the 12 and 15 year olds.

The empirical analyses presented below focus on the question whether at different ages participants from the two cultures grant priority to concerns of self-interest, moral obligations or interpersonal responsibilities when reasoning about practical choices and/or moral judgments in the hypothetical dilemmas situated in the two contexts of friendship and parent-child relationships. Given the different value orientations in the two cultures, we expected that marked cross-cultural differences would be in evidence over time. However, we also expected similarities in reasoning, due to general social-cognitive development in terms of an increasing understanding of the interpersonal and moral meaning of the situations from childhood and adolescence.

For the friendship dilemma we assumed that individualistic concerns were more salient in persons from Western cultures than from the Asian culture. It was further assumed that empathy and altruistic responsibilities towards the third child were more frequent in the Eastern than in the Western culture due to general concerns about group relationships and social harmony. We therefore expected that Chinese persons interpret the friendship dilemma as a conflict between moral concerns such as obligations and responsibilities towards a close friend and obligations towards the newcomer. For the Icelandic persons we assumed that responsibilities towards a close friend achieve increasing salience with development. Finally we assumed that the concerns of close friendship compared to the concerns of the new child would be more important for the Icelandic persons than for Chinese persons who may emphasize peer relations more strongly than close and intimate relationships.

In the parent–child dilemma we expected that obedience to parental authority and truth-telling were more dominant moral values in Chinese compared to Icelandic persons, both for children and adolescents. For the Icelandic persons we assumed that sibling/cousin loyalty and the aspect of promise breaking (on the part of the mother) will become more important in adolescence when the parent–child relationship becomes more symmetrical and parent–child conflicts may result in a stronger orientation toward peers. It is an open question, however, whether this type of developmental change occurs in Chinese persons where the norm of filial piety may support obedience to parents even in adolescence.

6. Reasoning about obligations and responsibilities in friendship

Content analyses of arguments in the friendship-dilemma included (a) the direction of choice (new child vs. friend) in the context of practical and moral reasoning (What will the protagonist self do/Is this the right choice?), and (b) their reasons offered for the action-alternatives in practical reasoning, independent of participants' own choice. In the context of moral reasoning the alternative option to participant's judgment was not systematically explored. If, however, persons spontaneously mentioned justifications for the alternative, they were taken into account in scoring. (For example, if a participant said, "it is right to go to the friend because they are very close friends, but it is also right to go to the other child because she is lonely", reasons for both options were scored.)

Four types of content categories represent theoretically relevant and most frequent reasons for the two options in the two contexts of practical and moral reasoning. Two categories referring to the "new child" indicate self-interest (reference to the *hedonistic* offers made by the new child) and *altruistic responsibilities* (helping/being with somebody who is new in class). Two categories referring to the "old friend" indicate *moral duty* (reference to promise given to the friend) and *interpersonal responsibilities* (reference to close friendship and needs of friend). Percent agreement for scoring content categories was above 90% for all categories in the different age groups from the two cultures. It should be emphasized that special cross-cultural and cross-linguistic efforts were made to validate the content categories used in the comparisons. This makes it unlikely that any of the reported results are due to language.

In the following the main findings for the friendship dilemma will be summarized. All effects discussed in the following are statistically significant effects in log-linear analyses (see Keller et al., 1998, for a detailed description of the statistical methodology and results).

The most salient cultural difference which remained stable across development emerged between the altruistic responsibilities of the Chinese towards the third child, as compared to self-interest in the Icelanders. The frequency of hedonistic reasons in the Icelandic participants did not decrease developmentally, nor did younger Chinese children use this type of reason more frequently than the older ones. Whereas self-interest also among the Icelanders was not perceived as a valid moral reason, altruism towards the new child, on the other hand, was of little importance for them, even in the context of moral reasoning. Over time, altruistic reasons even decreased in number in both in the context of practical and moral reasoning. A closer inspection of the altruistic reasons in the Chinese revealed an interesting developmental phenomenon. The youngest Chinese frequently mentioned the rules of the school or the teachers' requests to help someone who is new in class. Such a rule is part of the *ten moral rules* of the elementary school, which make it a moral duty to help somebody new in the class (Döbert, 1989) Thus, it seems that altruistic responsibilities are based, at least partly, in obedience to rules and authorities. This corresponds to moral heteronomy as defined by Piaget and Kohlberg, whereas in Western cultures care and responsibility have been seen as an outflow of empathy (Eisenberg, 1982; Hoffman, 1984). Such an empathy-based altruism is valid for older Chinese participants who referred to other's feelings and to generalized norms of helping a person who needs to be integrated into a friendship group.

An important context effect in the Chinese sample concerns an increase of altruistic reasons as moral justifications compared to a decrease of this category in the attribution of motives for the practical choice. This is consistent with the direction of the practical choice in which the majority of 15 year olds (about 90%) from both cultures gave preference to the close friend. However, the Chinese participants seemed to experience intense moral conflict when they opted for the friend. Across development, they interpreted the situation as a *conflict between altruism and friendship* while the Icelandic participants interpreted the situation mainly in terms of a *conflict between self-interest and friendship* (Keller & Edelstein, 1990). An analysis of feelings attributed to the

protagonist/self after making his or her choice (e.g., how does the protagonist/self feel if she stayed with the new child instead of meeting the friend?) revealed that Chinese persons consistently argued that the protagonist would feel bad independent of the direction of the choice. In contrast, the Icelandic persons consistently attributed positive feelings when they opted for the friend (Keller, Schuster, Fang, Hong, & Edelstein, 1996). This can be taken to indicate that the Icelandic participants feel in agreement with cultural values when they give priority to close friendship, while for the Chinese participants this does not seem to be the case. Even in adolescence, when they give priority to friendship, they feel that the protagonist has failed his or her responsibility towards the new child.

Regarding cultural differences in orientation to the principles of justice and care in reasoning about the option “friend”, our results both support and modify previous findings. In agreement with the cross-cultural differences, mentioned above, Icelandic participants were more frequently oriented towards the contractual aspect of the promise, while the Chinese were more concerned with interpersonal responsibilities towards the friend. Moreover, we had expected a developmental trend for persons in both cultures to become increasingly more sensitive to the interpersonal and moral aspects of the dilemma. Interestingly, a context effect was found in both cultures and across all four age groups: persons referred to interpersonal responsibilities more often in *practical* than in *moral* reasoning. Consistent with our expectations, Chinese participants used the category of relationship responsibilities more often than Icelandic participants at all ages, except at age 15 years. The Icelandic participants on the other hand showed a marked developmental increase in the relationship orientation over time such that at age 15 years no cultural difference remained between the two samples. For the promise orientation the results were reversed. This category was indeed used far more frequently by Icelandic participants at all ages, and even more in the context of moral reasoning than in the context of practical reasoning. For the Chinese participants the contractual aspect became increasingly important with time, but even at age 15 years this category did not quite reach the salience it achieved for the Icelanders. A more detailed analysis of reasons showed that Icelandic persons frequently used the category of friendship obligation, in which normative and relationship aspects are intertwined. This is true specifically for 15 year olds reasoning about the special obligation to keep a promise to the best friend. In sum, however, cultural differences in interpersonal and contractual orientations concerning close friendship *decreased* across time. Again, this supports the notion that in adolescence close friendship becomes a stronger value in both cultures.

The particular importance of close friendship both in the Western and the Asian culture is also documented in the choice patterns. In adolescence, participants from both cultures gave preference to the close friend and judged this preference to be morally right. Children in general had opted more frequently for the third child--the Chinese both in practical and in moral reasoning, the Icelanders in practical reasoning only. From a moral point of view the Icelandic children judged it to be right to meet with the close friend. Thus, in both cultures adolescents appeared to feel intimately connected with the friend. Responsibilities and obligations concerning how one ought to act towards a close friend achieve the status of central values for adolescents (Bukowski & Sippola, 1996; Keller, 2004; Keller & Edelstein, 1990). But it should be kept in mind that this developmental convergence originates from different values in the two cultures. For the Chinese friendship becomes a predominant value only over time. For the Icelanders close friendship is a moral value from the youngest age onwards. But the developmental task apparently is to give this value motivational priority and thus to establish consistency between moral judgment and practical choice.

7. Reasoning about obligations and responsibilities in the authority dilemma

The authority dilemma was assessed at ages 12 and 15 years only. In this dilemma reasons were explored only for the moral judgment and not for the practical choice. Analyses concern (1) the direction of moral judgment and (2) the moral justifications supporting both action alternatives (informing or not informing the mother). Three types of reasons were selected as predominant concerns. Informing the mother is justified by normative-moral concerns (truth-telling or not deceiving, and parental authority or respect). Not informing the mother is justified either by the moral norm of promise keeping (mother should not break a promise) or by relationship responsibilities towards the sister (affection, helping, friendship). Inter-rater reliabilities for categories amount to about 90% for cultures and age groups. We analyzed the direction of normal choice and the reasons for two action alternatives of informing or not informing the mother about the whereabouts of the sister.

Compared to the friendship dilemma, the findings for the parent–child dilemma revealed a different picture of consistency and change in cross-cultural differences (Keller, 2003). Regarding the direction of moral judgment, cultural differences were conserved over developmental time and became even more salient. This was particularly true for adolescents, where the Icelandic participants saliently changed the direction of moral judgment from the position, at age 12, that it is *right to tell* mother the truth, to the position at age 15, that it is *right not to tell* the truth. This change may be taken to indicate adolescent independence from, or even resistance to parental authority. Only a slight change in this direction can be observed in the Chinese participants, whereas the majority gives priority to parental authority as the 12 year olds do. Thus, for the Chinese, filial piety remains a predominant value in adolescence. Normative expectations, including the moral value of not deceiving or obeying one’s parents were emphasized more frequently by Chinese participants than by the Icelandic ones. This difference decreased slightly at age 15 years, but remained significant between the two cultures. Both contractual and interpersonal reasons were given for the moral judgment not to inform mother. The contractual aspect of the promise, which the mother had given to the daughter, has somewhat greater importance for the Icelandic 15-year-olds compared to the Chinese, but this effect does not reach statistical significance. A closer look at the arguments referring to promise keeping reveals that the Icelandic adolescents begin to establish a more symmetrical relationship between parents and children. From this position it follows that both sides are expected to acknowledge fairness rules. The Chinese adolescents, on the other hand, emphasized the relationship aspect, that the mother will come to understand that she, too, has made a mistake. Interpersonal responsibilities towards the sister constituted the second type of reason for not telling mother the truth. These concerns were used about equally by the 12-year-olds from both cultures. At age 15 years, however, this type of reason is mentioned more frequently by the Chinese than by the Icelandic participants. Again, it must be taken into account that the Chinese give preference to the value of parental authority compared to the value of sibling loyalty as documented by the direction of the moral judgment. In sum, these findings show that parental authority is confirmed more strongly by the Chinese persons than by the Western ones, while the dilemma appears to be less suited to reveal differences in adolescents’ orientation towards justice or care.

8. Conclusion

Overall, the results of our study both confirm and expand the findings from cross-cultural research comparing Western and Asian cultures. In these studies it has been shown that individuals from Western and Asian cultural contexts were differentially sensitive to self-interest as well as to moral obligations and interpersonal responsibilities. In order to disentangle possible effects of culture and development that have received little attention previously, cultural differences were pursued in a developmental framework. This implied including different age groups from childhood to adolescence (7-, 9-, 12-, and 15-year-olds) as well as introducing meaningful contexts of development, such as close friendship and parent–child relationship. The results of the study bear out the necessity to take these factors into account when explaining the development of socio-moral understanding. The findings for the Icelandic participants are consistent with Western socialization theories that postulate a predominantly self-centered motivation for younger children. Moral knowledge is seen as external to the self and thus moral motivation may lag behind moral knowledge (Nunner-Winkler, 1993; Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988). Only with the development of a moral self is moral consistency established (Blasi, 1983; Keller & Edelstein, 1990). The idea of increasing internalization of moral values is at the core of socialization theories which postulate a sequence from self-interest to conformity with social values (Hoffmann, 1970) and, possibly, to moral autonomy (Blasi, 1993). Our results suggest that this Western socialization model is not universal and that it does not do justice to Asian persons with whom interpersonal concerns are dominant even in early development (see also Keller, 2004). Consistent with findings from other studies which highlight the concern for social harmony as a salient characteristic of the sociomoral reasoning in Asian societies including China (Boyes & Walker, 1988; Eckensberger & Zimba, 1997) Chinese persons even in the youngest age group perceive the friendship dilemma as a conflict between two equally important obligations of friendship and altruism. Among the younger Chinese persons the culturally prescribed norm of altruism has priority over close friendship both regarding practical choice and moral judgment. This appears to be a result of the intensive moral socialization that Chinese children undergo in kindergarten and elementary school. Taking care of somebody who is new in the group is one of the rules that a morally good student must follow. Interestingly, however, in the course of

development the value of close friendship achieves priority over the culturally prescribed norm of altruism towards peers in the group. Thus our findings only partly confirm Berndt's (1993) speculation about cultural barriers against close friendship in China. They also support the constructivist approach according to which developmental change does not merely reproduce cultural norms (see also Turiel, 1998, this volume). Individuals, far from being but passive recipients of implicit and explicit socialization through interactions with others, actively construct the meaning of relationships and moral norms. Socialization experiences in family and school are only one source of the construction process of moral sensibility in friendship, a source apparently stronger in young childhood than in adolescence. Biological changes and increasing involvement in peer relationships in adolescence may represent a second source of moral growth. This appears to be general across the two different cultures which otherwise represent different life-worlds. Our findings concerning friendship can be interpreted to the effect that experience in peer and friendship relationships may modify and even transform prevailing cultural concerns and socialization patterns.

Comparing the two dilemmas, it is clear, however, that friendship and parent-child relationships represent quite different contexts for moral reasoning. While in the friendship context cultural differences in moral judgments appear to decrease in adolescence in the authority context cultural differences seem to persist or even increase. This finding may be interpreted to the effect that the cultural norm of filial piety represents a moral value of cultural importance so great that it is hard to transcend. The expectation of a relationship of equality between parents and children seems less strong in the Chinese than in Icelandic adolescents. It is an open question how much the norm of filial piety will be transformed in the process of modernization as some authors suspect (Ho, 1996). In the Western world processes of modernization have changed the unilateral structure of relationships that Piaget had in mind when he emphasized the differences between parent-child and peer-relationships. As mentioned above, Iceland represents a society that historically was characterized by more egalitarian parent-child relationships due to the specific life-conditions prevailing in settlement farms in the rural past (Edelstein, 1983).

When interpreting the meaning and generalizability of our findings it should be kept in mind that socio-moral reasoning was assessed using only one dilemma in the context of peer- and parent-child relationships. Clearly it would be desirable to vary the conflict situations in order to test for cross-situational stability. In the long run, however, we hope that our research data will provide a more comprehensive account of the structure of socio-moral reasoning in the two cultures by taking into account general reasoning about the norm of promise keeping, friendship and parent-child relationships. A comparison of 19 year olds from both cultures permits to trace interpersonal moral reasoning about close relationships beyond adolescence. Cultural similarities and differences that were typical of adolescence were conserved into young adulthood (Keller, 2004). Young adults in both cultures revealed a shift from the adolescents' concerns for intimacy in relationship to concerns for autonomy observed in the friendship reasoning of Western young adults (Selman, 1980). However, Chinese emphasized the embeddedness of friendship-relationships in the wider society more strongly while Icelanders emphasized the private nature of close friendship. The present study should be viewed as a first step towards exploration of the little known territory of the morality of close relationships.

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